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JUNE

Adventure

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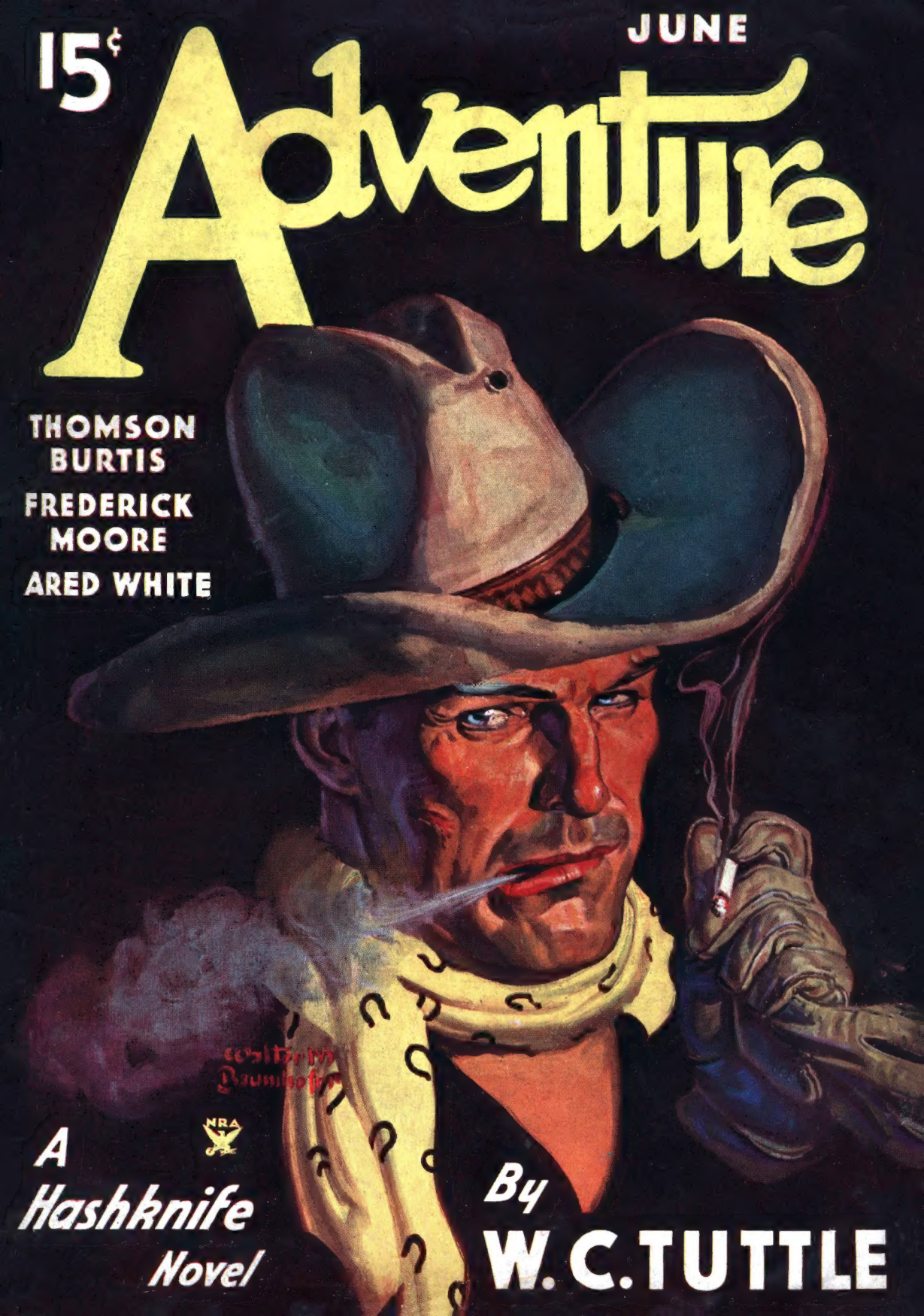

A Hashknife Novel

By W. C. TUTTLE

GOING PLACES . . .

NOT IN years have prospects been brighter for *Adventure* and its authors and readers. Things are humming in the office, and plans are under way which will soon bear fruit in a fashion close to the hearts of all *Adventure's* old friends. A bigger and better magazine in every way appearing more frequently on the stands—this hint should answer the persistent demands in every day's mail for restoration of the glamorous old *Adventure* that first gained the loyal interest of a great army of readers.

In token of these earnest intentions, *Adventure* submits the following list of great stories already in preparation for certain publication this year: a complete novel of the dangerous Orinoco back country by Arthur O. Friel; a long yarn of the sea and the mastery of ships by Bill Adams; a serial of the raiding, fighting days of the gallant Sir Francis Drake on the Spanish Main by Donald Barr Chidsey; a novelette of the Foreign Legion by Georges Surdez; a long tale of lusty humor and fast action in the days of the *condottieri* by F. R. Buckley.

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Complete Novel

HASHKNIFE

THROWS A DIAMOND HITCH

SP. SANTLEY, known in the Rimrock country as the Saint, had absorbed enough raw whisky to paralyze an ordinary mortal; but because he was not an ordinary mortal he was never really drunk. He was a huge man, fifty years of age, powerful as one of his own range bulls. His hair and immense beard were white as snow, in strong contrast to his skin, which was nearly as dark as an Indian's.

He was bareheaded, his white mane standing up like the roach on an old grizzly. Around his lean waist was belted a heavy gun, the holster hanging low on his thigh. Despite his reputed wealth there was nothing of the dandy about the Saint.

He was an enigma to those around him. He would give a forceful order one day, and might change it entirely the next. He owned the Silver Standard —gambling house, saloon and honkatonk —the biggest place of amusement in Rimrock. His S-Bar-S cattle outfit was the largest spread in the country, and it was rumored that he owned a big interest in the silver mines.

The Silver Standard was in full blast. It was pay day at the mines—pay night with the big play of the month, and this place always got more than its share of the money. Topaz Allen was the boss of the Silver Standard—a tall, hard eyed, handsome gambler, whose tastes ran to topaz jewelry. He was the boss gambler, boss of the honkatonk and of the long mahogany bar where five bartenders worked on pay night.

Topaz Allen did not take orders from the Saint. That is, he never carried out the Saint's orders unless they suited his convenience.

The Saint stood watching the thirsty crowd at the bar. The girls were reaping a harvest of commission checks; the games were all crowded. Miners played, some wearing their best clothes, others just off shift and reeking with the muck of the mines. Silken clad girls, cowboys with big hats and clinking spurs were speaking their polyglot jargon.

A young cowboy came strolling through the crowd. He stopped near the Saint. He was wearing a pale blue silk shirt, nearly the color of his eyes,

By W. C. TUTTLE

and a green neckerchief; and when he removed his pearl colored sombrero he disclosed a mop of flaming red hair atop his freckled face. Brick Travis was not handsome, but he was capable and honest as far as any one knew.

He affected fancy chaps decorated with huge silver conchas, which had cost him the price of two or three cows; and the rest of his outfit showed that Brick had a flair for fancy doodads.

The Saint's eyes shifted to Brick; a scowl twisted his face. Brick gave his order, turned slightly and looked at the Saint. He noticed the scowl, and a lazy smile wrinkled his face.

"Join me in a drink, Saint?"

The big man eyed him for several moments.

"No," he replied gruffly.

Brick shrugged his shoulders and turned to the bar, but there was a smile in his blue eyes. He took his glass and turned to face the Saint again.

"Well, here's luck, Saint!" He tossed off the drink.

The big man leaned close to Brick.

"You and your damn smile—wishin' me luck! I want none of it!"

Brick drew out tobacco and papers, his lips twisting in a grin.

"I'd shore hate to be as sour as you are, Saint. Money rollin' in on you, silver sellin' at the peak—and you hate me and my old dad jist because we struck water on the JT. You and Wick Le Moyne ought to go in partnership hatin' us."

"Damn you, you dried up my springs with your artesian water—and you've almost done the same to Le Moyne!"

Brick grimaced impishly.

"It ain't goin' no place, Saint. Jist flowin' up and flowin' down. Danged stuff sinks away in two hundred yards. We're figurin' on puttin' in alfalfa after 'while; but we'd sell water. At least we'd sell enough for your few head of cattle—yours and Le Moyne's."

"You won't never sell me any of your damn water!"

"Well—" Brick shrugged—"that's up to you."

"I'd sell out the S-Bar-S before I'd pay you a cent."

"Without water you'd have to sell

mighty cheap, Saint. But if you want to sell cheap enough, we might buy you out."

"You? You ain't got enough money to buy my bunkhouse."

"Not now. But with the water we've got, you ain't got enough money to buy that one little hole in the ground. Don't bite me. I know you've had engineers tryin' to work out a drillin' scheme for you, and they've told you it's no use. You could never reach water on your place. Le Moyne had to go five hundred feet to get his, and he never got much."

"You know quite a lot, don'tcha," growled the Saint. "You and your old man think you can work a holdup, don'tcha? Well, you can't, damn you, Travis! No man can hold me up; I'm not built that way."

"No," Brick drawled, "we never had such a thing in mind. We ain't askin' you for anythin'. We don't care what you do. All we want is to be let alone. We own every head of cattle or horses on this range marked with the JT. Once in awhile it seems that somebody gets astigmatism and can't tell one brand from another."

"You ain't meanin' that personal, are you, Travis?" asked the Saint coldly.

"I ain't accusin' anybody, Saint; I'm merely tellin' you what has happened."

"Can you prove it?"

Brick smiled and shook his red head.

"If I could prove it, Saint, somebody would jist be out of luck."

"Then stop talkin' about it, Travis. You talk too much, anyway; and that kind of talk is dangerous. Now I'll buy a drink."

"Buy one for yourself, Saint; I'm not drinkin' with you."

ONE of the employees of the house stepped in and touched the Saint on the arm.

"There's a pretty girl out in front wantin' to see you," he said in a low voice. "Came in on the train, she said."

The big man scowled at the interruption.

"Pretty girl? Wantin' to see me? Tell Topaz; he hires all the girls." The Saint turned back to the bar.

The man crossed the room and gave the message to Topaz Allen, who was watching the play at a roulette layout. Topaz nodded and walked to the front door. Several men were at the entrance, talking boisterously. On the edge of the sidewalk stood the girl.

Topaz stopped short and looked at her in the yellow lights from the saloon. She was about five feet six inches in height and slender, wearing a gray traveling suit and a small hat. But Topaz was not looking at the ensemble; he was beholding a perfect oval face, clear dainty features, and a pair of wide, wistful, gray eyes. There was just enough of her hair peeping under the brim of her little hat to show a streak of burnished gold.

Topaz smiled as he stepped toward her.

"How do you do?" he said cordially. "Did you wish to see me?"

"You are not Mr. Santley, are you?" she asked.

"No, I am Topaz Allen; I hire all the girls. Mr. Santley owns the Silver Standard, but I employ every one."

"Oh, I see," she said simply.

He looked at her admiringly, and decided that she would be a welcome addition to the Silver Standard.

"Can you sing or dance?"

"Why, I—" she hesitated—"I sing a little."

"I see. You've worked in honkatonks before, of course. Damn it, you look pretty young to be in this business!"

"What is a honkatonk?"

Topaz laughed shortly; but after a sharp look at her eyes he sobered.

"Are you trying to kid me, sister?"

"I do not know what you mean, Mr. Allen."

"No? Well, I don't quite get you. Just who are you, and what do you want here?"

"I want to see Mr. Santley."

"About going to work here?"

"Why, no. I did not expect to work here."

Topaz ran the fingers of his right hand through his hair, glanced back into the saloon where he could see the huge, white haired head of the Saint above the rest at the bar. He turned back to the girl.

"Come with me. I'll see if the Saint will talk to you."

He led the girl around to a door which opened to Topaz's private office. A close inspection under stronger lights proved to him that this girl was really beautiful.

"Sit down," he said. "I'll see what I can do."

He opened a door which led to the saloon. The Saint was at the bar, drinking with the miners, but stepped away to listen to Topaz's explanation about the girl.

"What the hell does she want to see me for?"

"I've never dug into your private affairs, so I didn't ask her," replied Topaz.

"She don't want a job?"

"No, but I wish she did. You better come and talk with her."

The Saint grunted disgustedly, but followed Topaz, who let him into the office and closed the door, going back to the roulette wheel.

The Saint studied the girl for several moments, then went closer, with narrowed eyes, stopping with his big hands on the desk top.

"You are Mr. Santley?" she asked.

"Yeah," he grunted softly, his eyes on her face.

"No one met me at the train. I—I didn't know just how to find you. You received the letters and all that?"

"I don't know what you're talkin' about," he said. "Who are you, anyway?"

"I am Leta."

"Leta? Leta who?"

"Every one calls me Leta Morris, but my right name is Leta Santley."

The big man straightened up slowly, his left hand going nervously to his white beard. After a few moments he seemed to pull himself together.

"I never heard of you before," he said. "Name's the same as mine, but —well, what do you want of me?"

The girl looked at him wide eyed.

"Why, don't you see—you are my father."

The Saint's jaw tightened for a moment.

"You're crazy," he said huskily. "I never had a daughter. Why, I've only been married eight years. Where did you git this crazy idea?"

"You got all the papers and everything that the lawyer sent you from San Diego."

"Not me; I never got any papers from San Diego."

"They were sent more than two weeks ago, registered."

"I don't know what papers you're talkin' about."

The girl got to her feet.

"Do you mean to deny that I am your daughter? My mother's name was Nora Morris, and you married her twenty years ago. You separated three years later when I was less than a year old, and my mother kept me. You can't deny this."

The Saint's face twisted angrily.

"Can't I? Who told you all this, anyway?"

"My mother told me," she said defiantly. "I've known it for years."

"I reckon you've got the wrong Santley," he said. "I'm sorry, but I'm not the man you're lookin' for."

The girl looked at him thoughtfully and turned away toward the outside exit.

"I'm sorry."

"Yeah, it's too bad—comin' all the way out here on a wild goose chase. If I was you, I'd go back to San Diego. Rimrock City ain't no place for a girl like you."

The door closed behind her; for a full minute the Saint stood there, staring at the closed door, his face twisted curi-

ously. Suddenly he jerked up his head and muttered a bitter oath as he turned and went back to the barroom.

THE girl had gone back through the narrow street to the main street. The wooden sidewalks were thronged with men, going from saloon to saloon. The girl started across the street toward the Rimrock Hotel, where she had left her baggage, and on the narrow cross walk she met a roistering bunch of cowboys coming from the Silk Hat Saloon.

"Hyah, sister!" yelled one of them. "C'mon and have a drink."

The girl shrank away from them. They laughed. One of them made a grab at her, but a more sober one jerked him away.

"Quit it, Buck!"

"Lemme alone, damn you, Ollie! You quit yankin' me around, or I'll bend a gun over your empty head."

"You'll do nothin' of the kind. Who didja think that was—one of Topaz's girls? You're drunk."

But the girl hurried away, reached the sidewalk and turned toward the hotel. In front of the Silk Hat Saloon a huge Mexican, reeking of garlic and bad whisky, grasped her by the arm, laughing down into her frightened face.

"*Buenas noches, amiga,*" he gurgled; and the next instant a prompt hard fist crashed against his ear, knocking him off the sidewalk.

The girl screamed and backed against the wall. Brick Travis had hit the Mexican; and when the girl calmed enough to understand what had happened, Brick was standing near her, facing a big man with fierce mustaches, who carried a heavy cane. On his shirt front was a silver shield, his badge of authority. Several more men came from the saloon, crowding in behind the big man with the cane—Andy Voss, the marshal of Rimrock City.

"You tryin' to start trouble, Brick?" asked Voss harshly. "You damn cowpunchers always manage to start somethin' on pay night."

"That big Mexican grabbed this girl, so I batted him one," replied Brick evenly.

Voss turned and looked at the girl.

"Friend of yours, Brick?"

"I hope so; but I never seen her before. And while you're nursin' a grouch, Andy, you might remember that you was hired to make this street safe for decent women."

"Don't you try to tell me my business, Travis."

"You shore need to be told, Voss; and that goes as she lays."

Brick turned to the girl.

"I'm sorry, ma'am," he said. "The main street of Rimrock City ain't no place for a girl to be alone; so if you ain't afraid to trust me, I'll see you safe to where you're goin'."

"Thank you so much," she managed to say. "I'm just going to the hotel up there."

"I'll walk up with you, if you don't mind."

They walked up to the hotel and found the lobby deserted. Her bag was standing against the wall at the foot of the stairs. They walked back to the counter together. The girl was not yet over her fright.

"What a terrible place this is!" she exclaimed breathlessly.

"It ain't the place, it's the people," smiled Brick.

"I suppose that is true. I want to thank you for helping me."

"That wasn't anythin', ma'am. You see, I was in the saloon when a feller told the Saint that a pretty girl wanted to see him. He turned the job over to Topaz Allen, and I went to the door where I could see. You didn't look like the kind of girl who would work in the Silver Standard.

"I knew he took you to his office, and I know he took the Saint in there to see you. Well—" Brick smiled widely—"I was watchin' for you to come back to the street, and that's how I happened to pat that drunken Mexican on the ear."

The girl smiled at him and he liked it.

"Do they call Mr. Santley the Saint?"

"Yes'm. You see, his initials are S. P. Somebody nicknamed him Saint Peter, and then they shortened it. But he ain't no saint. It's like callin' a tall man Shorty."

"Isn't he a—a good man?"

"Good?" Brick smiled. "I dunno. Mebbe it all depends whether he's for you or against you."

"Is he for *you?*"

"No, ma'am, I don't reckon he is. You goin' to stay here at the hotel?"

The girl sighed and looked around.

"I don't know what I am going to do. You see, I just arrived tonight from San Diego, and I—I wish I hadn't come."

Brick looked at her curiously, wondering why she had wanted to see the Saint, why she had come all the way from San Diego and wished she hadn't.

"It's funny. We've both got red hair," he remarked.

"Terrible, isn't it?"

"Awful. They call me Brick. Full name's Brick Travis."

"And mine is Leta Santley."

"Yeah? Santley—any relation to the Saint?"

Leta turned away for a moment and her lips trembled.

"I—I guess not."

Brick looked at her thoughtfully. A drunken miner stumbled in and flopped limply into a chair. A fight started across the street, and there was yelling and laughing with audible oaths. The girl shuddered.

"You ain't never been in this sort of a place?" asked Brick.

"No, I never have, Mr. Travis."

"It'll be worse than this before mornin'. Hell busts loose in this town on pay night. Miss Santley, you don't know me, and I don't know you. My father and me run the JT cow outfit down south of here about six miles, and I've got the nicest little mother you ever seen. I think I've got you figured out right, and I'm askin' you if you wouldn't like to go down there for the night. I know danged well ma would like to have you."

Brick was sincere; and since Leta shuddered at the idea of staying all night in Rimrock City, she decided quickly.

"If it would be all right."

"You bet it'll be all right. C'mon. I'll take your valise, and we'll git a rig at the livery stable. We can lead my horse."

"Wouldn't I be a bother, really?"

"Huh!" snorted Brick, picking up the bag. "Bother! That would shore make ma laugh. You jist walk close to me and don't look at anybody.

After Topaz Allen saw the Saint come back to the bar he went to the office. He found it empty. He did not question the Saint, but went on a little hunt of his own, looking for the girl. He saw the commotion in front of the Silk Hat Saloon, then met the city marshal, who told him what had happened. A little later he saw Brick Travis and the girl leave the hotel with the valise.

Topaz was curious enough to shadow them to the livery stable and see them drive away together, leading Brick's horse. Then he went back to the Silver Standard. He joined the Saint at the bar.

"The girl didn't stay long," observed Topaz.

The Saint turned his head and looked at his boss gambler. The Saint was as drunk as Topaz had ever seen him.

"She didn't have no business here," he said heavily.

Topaz nodded and accepted a drink.

"Is she a friend of Brick Travis's?"

The Saint stared at Topaz for several moments.

"A friend of Brick Travis's?" he muttered. "What do you mean?"

"I seen 'em drive away in a livery rig awhile ago," replied the gambler. "Brick knocked a Mexican down in front of the Silk Hat awhile ago, and later they drove away together."

"The hell they did!" The Saint grunted, reaching for the whisky bottle again. "Have another drink, Topaz."

"Not me—" the gambler smiled—"I can't stand that stuff like you can."

"Me, hell! I'm drunk, Topaz. I tell you, I'm so drunk I can't feel anythin'; so drunk that nothin' matters. And I'm goin' to keep on drinkin'. My wife will give me hell, but I don't care."

"I guess you're the boss," encouraged Topaz, laughing.

"Damn right! Invite everybody up to the bar, Topaz."

THERE is a road that winds through the mesquite and sage, where the giant saguaro rears its head and seems to reach its arms in dumb supplication to a heaven that sends little water. It drops down through a rocky canyon suddenly opening out on a broad mesa. And on this plateau is Rimrock City, from which a stream of silver bullion flows out into the world of trade. A thin stream now, it is true, but enough to satisfy the needs of Rimrock.

Two miles south of the town is the depot, and beyond that lies the range of the S-Bar-S, Circle L, the JT and the ZS—the four cattle and horse outfits of the Rimrock ranges.

Along this twisting road came two dusty cowboys astride tired horses—a hard-bitten pair of drifting cowboys riding the north road to Rimrock City. One of them was taller than the average tall man, with a long, serious face, a generous nose and wide mouth. His gray eyes were nested in sun wrinkles, and they looked out upon the world with a peculiarly level gaze. Those who knew Hashknife Hartley never forgot his eyes and his wide-mouthed grin of friendship.

The other man was Dave—Sleepy—Stevens, a happy-go-lucky sort of cowboy. He was short of six feet, broad of shoulder, with a blocky, deeply lined face and a laughing mouth. His eyes were blue, and they seemed to be astonished at everything.

Both men wore faded shirts and flapping vests, which seemed to serve no purpose except as repositories for their tobacco and cigaret papers. Both wore overalls under their batwing chaps, wide, hand-made belts and holstered guns. There was nothing gaudy about them, and nothing to distinguish them from any other range riders.

"I reckon Rimrock City is over this hill," said Sleepy in a tired drawl. "Better be, 'cause this here bronc of mine aims to start grazin' any minute. Do you know why I look forward to Rimrock?"

"'Cause it's over the hill?"

"Check."

They glanced at each other, smiled and rode on. For several years this pair of wondering cowboys had been going over the hills to see what was on the other side. It was an obsession with them.

Hashknife Hartley, christened Henry, born in the northeast part of Montana, was one of a large family fathered by an itinerant range minister. Being obliged to rustle for a living at an early age, he became a cowboy with an itching foot. Drifting from range to range, down across the Western States, he finally arrived at the big outfit for which he was nicknamed.

Sleepy Stevens was there, having drifted down from the Idaho ranges, and in due time they rode away, heading toward the hills. It was not a remunerative calling, this drifting hither and yon. They were ordinarily short of ready money, a fact which bothered them not at all.

Hashknife's name was one to conjure with around the camp-fires. He had been born with a keen mind. He had developed ability to read human nature and an eye for small details. He had solved many a range mystery before the law wrote "closed" on its books.

But they were not man hunters. Neither of them had any desire to fill the penitentiary or feed the rope. Hashknife hated an unsolved mystery. It was a challenge to him—a game; and he played it straight to the finish. Not for money, but for the love of doing a good

deed for some needful mortal.

Neither of them were split-second gunmen; but many a time they had faced spitting guns, and had come away without a scratch. Life had made fatalists of them, and they never tried to forecast the end of the trail. As Hashknife had said:

"It's all there in the Big Book. Don't the Bible say somethin' like, 'The son of man goeth as it is written of him.' Somethin' like that. Don't it mean that your finish is all set? If you're born to be hung, you jist try to drown yourself!"

For several months they had been working on a cattle ranch far to the north of Rimrock City. It was almost time for them to leave, because the hills had been calling them again. Hashknife had dropped a line to the secretary of the Cattlemen's Association, who was an old friend, and in reply he received a few penciled words and a clipping from a Rimrock City paper. The note read:

> Dear Hashknife:
>
> Regarding clipping, detailed secretly on complaint of JT outfit. Last report no progress; on job two months. Can't believe suicide—too level headed. Can't you work this out? The usual salary for both of you. Wire acceptance.
>
> —JIM

The clipping read as follows:

> DRUNKEN COWBOY IS A SUICIDE
>
> Harry Neil, a cowboy employed by the Circle L outfit, was found dead this morning between town and the depot. He tied his horse just off the road, sat down on a rock and blew out his brains. Neil was quite drunk last night, it is reported, and acted in a despondent manner. The body will be buried in the Rimrock cemetery tomorrow morning.

Hashknife and Sleepy rode down into Rimrock City, left their horses to the mercy of the livery stable keeper, and wandered up the street. It was the day after pay night, and Rimrock City was suffering from a hangover.

They ate at a Chinese restaurant, wandered around awhile and finally sat down in the Silver Standard Saloon, just now the coolest spot in town. A few miners were bucking the games in a blank, mechanical fashion; a few argued at the bar. Near Hashknife and Sleepy a couple of gamblers lounged in their chairs at a table, smoking.

"I'll bet the Saint got hell," said one of them. "I never seen him so drunk as he was last night."

"I don't think anybody could give him hell."

"You don't know his wife."

"No, I never even saw her. Good lookin'?"

"For a woman of her age, she sure is good lookin'. Maybe you don't know it, but it was her money that made the Saint what he is today. He didn't have a dollar when he married her. And if you don't think she's his boss, you think some more."

The gambler laughed.

"Jealous, I suppose; most women are."

"Well, she is, anyway. That's why the Saint don't hang around here much at night. Too many girls."

"Hell, he never looks at any of them."

"I know he don't—but she don't know that for sure. Say, who was that girl last night, Ed? The one Topaz went out to talk with."

"I dunno. She wanted to see the Saint. I told him, and he said to send Topaz out. I never asked Topaz who she was."

"Looking for a job, I suppose," said the gambler, yawning.

"I don't think so; she wasn't that kind."

"Well, hell, I suppose I might as well go and eat something. What a play we had last night! Drunken Polocks, trying to outsmart a roulette wheel. Clumsy boneheads, stinking of alcohol. Whew! I wonder if they ever take a bath."

"You can't quit wonderin'," laughed the other. "I'll go and eat with you."

Their conversation meant nothing to Hashknife and Sleepy; but Hashknife

had a faculty of hearing a thing and filing it away in the back of his mind. He had heard of the Saint; but he didn't know that the Saint's wife was jealous, and that it was her money which had built up the fortune reputed to belong to S. P. Santley. The incident of the strange girl meant nothing.

FROM the talkative proprietor of the Rimrock Hotel, Hashknife learned a few things about the Rimrock range. The man had lived several years in the town and was an encyclopedia of information—knew everybody and everything.

He knew Harry Neil by sight and had attended the coroner's inquest. He said that Neil was still gripping the gun when they found him; one chamber was discharged. He had tied his horse to a mesquite snag, sat down and held the gun close to his head.

"Was he a heavy drinker?" asked Hashknife.

"I dunno. I never seen him drunk. But then I wouldn't, bein' as I'm mostly on the job over here."

Hashknife learned some of the history of the four outfits on the Rimrock range. It seemed that Jim Travis actually owned about two thousand acres of land, fenced in a long rectangle, between the property of the Circle L owned by Wick LeMoyne and the S-Bar-S owned by S. P. Santley.

There was the ZS spread, owned by Jeff Zorn and Sandy Shores. This was a small outfit, dealing mostly in horses, and of little importance. The S-Bar-S was the biggest cattle outfit, but the Circle L ran it a close second. It seemed that the S-Bar-S water all came from two big springs, while that of the Circle L was from wells. Neither of them had been bothered by lack of water until Jim Travis, sinking a well on the JT, had struck artesian water.

Through some freak or fault in the formation, the springs on the S-Bar-S sank to almost nothing, while the wells on the Circle L began dropping their water level. The JT outfit was down in a sort of sink, possibly an ancient river or lake bed; and engineers had told the Saint that, in order to strike water on the S-Bar-S, he would have to drill too deep for practical purposes. The Circle L was in the same predicament.

For a number of years the JT had been in the bad graces of both Wick LeMoyne and the Saint. Travis had a good spring which they both had coveted; and now he had artesian water. True, it sank back into the earth after a short run, but that was beside the case. The S-Bar-S and the Circle L faced ruin from lack of water. They both knew Jim Travis would not sell his ranch. The water was liquid gold, and Jim Travis knew its worth.

Hashknife was interested in the story. The JT outfit was the one complaining to the Association; and the detective sent to investigate was allegedly in a suicide's grave. Hashknife's nose twitched over the meager information.

"I don't suppose this Saint and LeMoyne are any too friendly with Travis and his son," remarked Hashknife.

"Well, I don't reckon they are," replied the hotel man.

"LeMoyne and Santley are friends?"

"Oh, sure."

"How about the ZS outfit; have they any troubles?"

"Not unless it's to git money enough for a drunk. They're sure a couple queer fellers—Zorn and Shores. Sell horses mostly. Come to town, git roarin' drunk together, quarrel like the devil and ride out of town yellin' bloody murder. Andy Voss, the marshal, swears he's goin' to salivate both of 'em next time they do it. I think Andy is a big blow, brother, a big blow."

"This is the county seat, ain't it?"

"Oh, sure. That's the courthouse back on a side street. Big old place; looks like a livery stable with a bell on it. Sheriff's office is down here on the Main street. Luke Haley is the sheriff. He's a good officer, makin' honest mis-

takes like they all does. Reckless Blair is his deputy; all bark and no bite. He thinks everythin' is done for him to laugh about. But I like Reckless."

"I suppose this place gits kinda salty on pay nights," Sleepy suggested casually.

"You ort to been here last night. Man, I never seen so many big fights, and nobody hurt much. Speakin' of the JT outfit—Brick Travis hit a big Mexican in the ear last night, and I seen that Mexican this mornin'. He had an ear like a elephant."

He grinned and went on:

"There was a girl came in on the train, and they gave her a ride up here in the mail wagon. Didn't seem to savvy much. Said she wanted to see Santley. Jist about that time Ed Corey, one of the gamblers from the Silver Standard, come down from his room, ready to go on shift. I told him about who she wanted to see, and he took her over there, I guess.

"Anyway, a little later this here drunk Mexican grabbed holt of her in front of the Silk Hat Saloon, and Brick Travis busted him in the ear. I wasn't here when she got back, but somebody said her and Brick got her valise and went away. Oh, we have lots of fights on pay night."

"Must be a pretty good payroll here at the mines," said Sleepy.

"Yeah, it sure is."

"Never bothered much with holdups around here, I don't suppose," said Hashknife.

"Well, not a whole lot. Ten days, two weeks ago, the mail car on the Limited was robbed. They got a couple sacks of registered mail, but I dunno what the stuff was worth. They dumped it off between here and Vista, and nobody knowed it for a long time. That is, they didn't know it until the two mail clerks was found tied up in their car. But we ain't been havin' no local robberies."

That was about all the gossip at the hotel.

LATER in the evening Hashknife and Sleepy met Andy Voss, the marshal. Voss was a little curious to know who these two strange cowboys were. Hashknife catalogued Andy as a rather harmless sort of person, who wanted everybody to know his name and rank. His size and fierce mustaches were his best assets as a marshal.

Luke Haley, the sheriff, was of a different type. He was a man about forty years of age, small, wiry, with a deeply lined face and a small head, closely enough cropped to show innumerable scars. Haley was not imposing, and his voice was weak; but Hashknife concluded that Haley was worth a dozen of Andy Voss.

Reckless Blair, the deputy sheriff, was nearly as wide as he was long. His hat size was No. 8, and his bony features were in proportion to the size of his head. Hashknife took one look at him, and decided that Reckless Blair had the biggest mouth he had ever seen. And that mouth laughed at every opportunity. Reckless looked upon the world as a continuous comedy.

While Luke Haley regarded the two strangers with indifference and shortly left the office, Reckless leaned back in a swivel chair and motioned the two cowboys to be seated.

"Welcome to our city," he said. "There ain't a puritan in the place, and everythin' goes except the cook stove and two joints of pipe. Gimme your Durham; I never smoke my own tobacco in front of strangers."

The three men relaxed and began rolling cigarets.

"Lookin' for work?" asked Reckless as he shaped his smoke.

"You used the wrong word," prompted Hashknife.

"I should have knowed better." Reckless grinned. "Are you lookin' for employment?"

"If you happen to know of any shady, settin'-down jobs," suggested Sleepy, lighting his cigaret carefully.

"Well, doggone me, if I don't believe you fellers are real cowboys! Shady, settin'-down jobs? No, I don't know any jist now; they're all taken. Mebbe the Circle L could let one of you set in their shade; they lost a puncher awhile back. Set down on a rock and blowed his brains out. Prob'ly wore himself out dodgin' work."

"Shot himself, eh?" queried Hashknife.

"Uh-huh. Feller named Neil. Been workin' a couple months for the LeMoyne outfit. They might need another man, I dunno."

"Big outfit?" asked Sleepy.

"Pretty big. The S-Bar-S is bigger. Santley owns it. You'll see him around here—great big geezer with a white beard. Owns the Silver Standard Saloon too. Folks around here kinda hop when he says for 'em to hop."

"You, too?" asked Hashknife.

"I dunno; he never asked me to hop. Don't reckon I would. I'm what you'd call a self-hopper. Oh, they don't all hop. F'r instance, the Travis family, who own the JT outfit, don't hop; but I heard lately that they've kinda got Santley hoppin' a little."

"I heard about that water deal," said Hashknife.

"Didja? Well, they've got the S-Bar-S and the Circle L outfits over a barrel. I dunno how it'll come out."

"What sort of a gent is Travis?" asked Hashknife.

"Jim Travis is the salt of the earth," replied the deputy sincerely. "Ma Travis is jist as fine as frog hair. Brick Travis is sort of a wild young puncher, independent as hell, plenty smart, and he'd bet odds that he could whip a buzzsaw. Yeah, I like Brick. He won't never say yes when he means no."

"Ain't there another outfit—ZS, or somethin' like that?"

"Oh, yeah. Their spread is farther to the east. Jeff Zorn and Sandy Shores have got a little outfit. Wild as hawks, full of the devil, and never have enough money to pay their grub bills."

"Does the Saint make them hop?" asked Sleepy.

"I'd like to see him try it. Zorn is prob'ly the fastest gunman in the country. Andy Voss, the marshal, swears he'll massacre both of 'em next time they go wild in town; but he won't. Andy is too slow, and he knows it. But Andy's all right. He's strong for self-preservation—there's so danged much of him."

"I'd buy a drink," suggested Sleepy.

Reckless jerked forward in his chair.

"That's a good idea to git all of a sudden thataway; c'mon, before you forget what you said."

THE patio of the JT ranch was a cool spot in the morning, with high walls and a huge, gnarled old sycamore shading it from the sun.

Ma Travis was a slender little woman with white hair and a smiling, tanned face. She was sitting in the patio, preparing vegetables for the day, when Leta came out in the morning.

The girl stood in the wide doorway until Ma Travis looked up and saw her. They both smiled.

"Sleep well?" asked Ma.

"Just wonderfully," replied the girl, breathing in the rare air of the morning. "Isn't it beautiful here?"

Ma nodded.

"I love it, even if I have known it 'most all my life. I've always been a desert dweller."

Leta sat down on a bench.

"It was wonderful of your son to bring me down here," she said. "He didn't know me."

"Well, it was the only thing to do, my dear," replied Ma. "You couldn't have slept a wink in Rimrock last night."

"And he knocked a man down," continued Leta musingly. "Why, when I feel the peace of this place, I can hardly believe what happened last night."

"Brick would do that," said the old lady.

"He loves you so much," the girl told her. "Why, he talked about you all the way down here."

"It's good to hear that. I've tried to raise Brick right. He's a cowboy, and he will do the things that cowboys do; but I'd trust him anywhere."

"But aren't you worried sometimes, Mrs. Travis? All the men I've seen carry guns, and sometimes a fight starts, you know."

"Bless your heart, we're used to such things," replied Ma, as she finished peeling the last potato in the basket. "Men do fight, and Brick was brought up to fight his own battles. But, Lordy, I don't mind that as long as he is right. Men live hard, and they must fight hard to live, my dear."

"I have never been away from the city," said Leta. "Of course, I have read of such places as Rimrock City, but I didn't know they really existed."

"Well, they do," Ma smiled. "But we're used to it, I suppose."

Brick came through the house, his spurs jingling on the tiled floor. He kissed his mother and grinned at Leta.

"How're you feelin' this mornin'?" he asked.

"Oh, just fine," she replied. "It is wonderful here."

"Yeah, it's all right. I rode that Lazy K sorrel this mornin', Ma. He bucked into the stable door and busted one hinge all to smash. Now I've got to go to Rimrock and git a new one."

"Goodness! Did he fall with you?"

"Shore did. Didn't hurt me none, though. You want to ride up there, Ma?"

"You take the young lady with you, Brick; I've got work to do."

"Well, I aimed to take both of you," grinned Brick.

"I suppose I'd better take my valise," said Leta. "I've got to go back to San Diego."

"Well, now, you ain't going to do any such thing," protested Ma. "You just got here. No, don't you start any argument with me. Golly, I'm glad to have a girl around this house. I was sayin' to Jim last night after you went to bed, 'Jim, I wonder how we can help this girl, so she'll stay around here.' No, sir, you're not going to pull out on us this quick. You ride to town with Brick, and get back here for supper. Forget San Diego."

"Ma's a peach, ain't she?" asked Brick a little later, as they rode away in the ranch buckboard, leading the livery horse and buggy.

"Wonderful," said Leta seriously.

"Santley and LeMoyne don't think so," disclaimed Brick. "But Dad is a squareshooter too. We been talkin' about you and Santley. You see, we know him so well. He's a big man in this country, and he's gettin' bigger all the time.

"You see, our ranch is the meat in the sandwich. The S-Bar-S on one side, the Circle L on the other. They've both got money. If they had our water, they could afford to pipe it and raise alfalfa. Now that don't mean anythin' to you. You've always lived in a city, and you've always thought of water as somethin' that is as natural to have as the air you breathe. Down here it's worth lots of money. Water has been the cause of more killings than whisky. We've got to have water or die."

"It will make your ranch worth a lot of money, won't it?" asked Leta.

"And dangerous," added Brick grimly. "We don't know what sort of a move they'll make. We've always had good water. But neither Santley nor LeMoyne have ever tried to buy us out until we hit that artesian well. We've lost cattle and horses—not big bunches at a time, but enough to put quite a crimp in us. Dad appealed to the Association, and they said they'd sent a detective out here. They didn't say who he was; they never do, because they never want anybody to know who he is. But I guess he never did anythin'."

"I don't understand about those letters and things the lawyer sent to Mr. Santley," said Leta. "It must have been

nearly three weeks ago. He registered them."

"He did, eh?" grunted Brick thoughtfully. "By golly, I'll bet I know what happened. About two weeks ago the mail car on the Limited was robbed and they took all the registered mail. Do you suppose your stuff was in that mail?"

"Why, it might have been."

"What have you got left to prove the Saint is your father, Leta?"

"Enough to prove it, I believe, if I care to prove it, Brick. I have the marriage certificate and a number of letters which he wrote to mother after they separated."

"Well, that's fine. But forget him now. You ain't goin' back to San Diego—not for awhile. You said yourself that you didn't have no place to go down there. Why, Ma would be jist sick if you didn't stay awhile."

THE Saint and Topaz Allen were standing in front of the Silver Standard as Leta and Brick drove in and tied their team in front of a store. They had left the other outfit at the livery stable. Topaz Allen recognized the girl. He turned to the Saint, who was staring across the street. Topaz said nothing, and they went into the saloon together.

But the Saint had something on his mind. He refused a drink! After a period of contemplation he asked Topaz to step back to the office. They went in and closed the door.

"What's on your mind?" queried the gambler.

"Set down," ordered the Saint gruffly.

He helped himself to a cigar from a box on the desk and bit the end of it savagely.

"Topaz," he said, lowering his voice carefully, "I'm tellin' you somethin' that I wouldn't tell another livin' soul; and if you open your mouth about it to anybody else I'll kill you."

"I never asked you anything, did I?" queried the gambler.

"You've probably wondered a hell of a lot since last night."

"Oh, about that girl?"

"You're not playin' poker with me, Topaz; act natural. You've done plenty wonderin' about that girl."

"Well, what about her?" asked Topaz.

"She's my daughter."

"Your daughter?" grunted Topaz in amazement.

"That's right. You know it and I know it, but that's as far as it ever goes. Listen to me, Topaz. A few weeks ago I got a letter from a lawyer in San Diego. He was actin' for this woman, my former wife. He said she was dyin', in need of money. He wanted me to come down there. Can you imagine that? Me! My Lord, I couldn't let my present wife know about her. So I wired him a couple of hundred dollars and told him I couldn't come. I lied; said I was in a hospital. Why, I haven't heard from her for years—didn't know she was alive.

"And last night this girl walks in on me. I tell you it was like seein' a ghost."

"Well, why not accept her? She's a pretty girl."

"Accept her? You wipe that grin off your face, or I'll knock it off."

"You won't knock any grin off my face, you big fourflusher," said Topaz evenly. "You don't think I've worked for you as long as I have and not know you pretty well."

"What do you know?" asked the Saint harshly.

"I know things that the rest of the town don't know. I know your wife's money put you where you are. She's the Big Boss. What she says is law to you, and you know it. It wouldn't surprise me if everything was in her name. Now, go ahead."

"How do you know all this stuff?" asked the Saint.

"Guessed it."

"Are you goin' to help me or not, Topaz?" the Saint added weakly.

"How can I help you? If you've got a good idea, I'll help you put it over.

If not, I keep still and let you work out your own salvation. You were a fool ever to answer that lawyer's letter. You are the big financier of Rimrock, and the girl wants her share. Why not go to your wife and tell her the whole story?"

"Tell my wife about this girl bein' my daughter?"

"Well, sure; tell her you were married before."

"Fine advice!" snorted the Saint angrily. "Very, very fine!"

Topaz hunched over in his chair, examining his polished fingernails, his brow furrowed in thought. Suddenly he looked up.

"You were divorced from this other woman, wasn't you?" he asked.

"No!" breathed the Saint. "That's the hell of it."

The handsome gambler stared at his employer. The Saint—the biggest man in the Rimrock country, the political boss—admitting that his wife was the financial power behind his throne; admitting that he owned nothing; denying his own daughter through fear of his present wife. Topaz shook his head thoughtfully.

"Thats bigamy," he said.

"Shut up, Topaz! I know what it is. Leta's mother is dead; died a short time ago. But that don't alter the fact that I had no right to marry my present wife. She's suspicious and jealous; always has been. I caught hell for gettin' drunk last night."

"You ought to be old enough to know what you want to do," said Topaz.

"Old enough, yeah. This girl says that a bunch of papers was sent to me by registered mail—the proofs of me bein' her father. I never got 'em. Maybe they was stolen in that mail robbery. If they was, heaven bless the robbers. I don't want 'em, Topaz; I can't afford to ever have the proofs."

"But don't you suppose she has some proofs?"

"That's what I want to know." The big man groaned. "But how can I do it? She must have. She's no fool, Topaz, and she's got nerve."

"She never inherited it from you."

The Saint bristled.

"She didn't, eh? I asked you for help, and I get sarcasm. Topaz—" the Saint got up and leaned across the desk close to the gambler—"If you doublecross me in any way, I'll kill you. I've showed you my cards, asked you for help to play 'em safe. You play the game with me, and you won't lose."

Topaz smiled thoughtfully; but a sudden idea caused him to sober quickly.

"Saint, don't you suppose she has told, or will tell, the Travis family? She will naturally tell them why she came here."

"I—I never thought of that."

"Don't worry," Topaz said. "It'll all work out right. You've got enough back of you to make it work out right."

"It's all right to talk; but as long as that girl is here I'm in danger, Topaz."

"Maybe she'll go back home and drop things."

"Not if she's told anythin' to Travis; and she probably has."

"Well, wait and see what happens."

"I guess that's the thing to do," agreed the Saint wearily.

Topaz leaned back in his chair, lighted a cigar and studied the big man through half closed lids. The Saint was looking down at the floor. He finally lifted his head and looked at Topaz.

"Thinkin' about somethin', Topaz?" he asked.

"Wondering," replied the gambler.

"What are you wonderin' about?"

"Wondering how in the devil you've fooled Rimrock as long as you have. They think you're a big man, Saint. You try to act like a big man. If I didn't know the inside of this proposition, you might even fool me."

The Saint smiled bitterly and shook his head.

"I don't know," he said. "My wife's brains, I suppose. She don't show her hand in anythin'—except to me. I handle all the business. The money is in the bank in my name, but I have to

account for every damn cent."

"You were broke when you married her, Saint?"

"I never had a dollar."

"And so she took a lump of clay and made a man," said Topaz.

The Saint got slowly to his feet and walked over to the door, where he turned and looked back at the gambler.

"She did like hell!" he said softly.

HASHKNIFE, Sleepy and Reckless were in the Silk Hat Saloon when Jeff Zorn and Sandy Shores came in. Reckless introduced them to his two companions, and Zorn yelled loudly for the bartender, although that worthy was just across the bar.

Zorn was of medium height and slender. He looked as hard as nails. He was dark as an Indian, with a mop of swarthy hair and a small mustache. His face was thin almost to the point of emaciation.

Sandy Shores was larger than his partner, sandy haired and blue eyed. He had the neck and shoulders of a wrestler; his legs were slender and very bowed.

Zorn turned to Hashknife.

"You workin' around here?" he asked.

"We jist got here," replied Hashknife. "Ain't landed a job yet."

"Uh-huh. Well, I wish we had more room and we'd take you on. But me and Sandy ain't got much of a place; and if we ever made forty a month apiece off'n it—well, we'd shore drive Andy Voss crazy. We jist sold a couple broncs to LeMoyne. Set 'em up, bartender."

As they were drinking a stranger drifted in. He was a middle-aged man, tall, well built, dressed in a gray suit and wearing a tan Stetson. Sleepy turned and looked at him. Instant recognition caused Sleepy's mouth to jerk open, and his spurred heel rasped against Hashknife's ankle.

"Turn around and look at this!" snorted Sleepy.

Hashknife turned.

"Bob Forrest, you old son of a gun!"

"Well, well, well!" The man chuckled. "Imagine runnin' into you two drifters!"

They shook hands solemnly, and Hashknife introduced him to the others. Forrest turned and smiled at Hashknife, who was eyeing him closely.

"Ain't changed a bit," said Forrest. "Time don't mean a thing to you, Hashknife. Sleepy's got a couple more wrinkles in his neck. Gee, I'm shore glad to meet you fellers again. I've heard of you bein' in places, but I never was lucky in bein' there soon enough. Are you still lookin' for the other side of the hills?"

"Still lookin'." Hashknife smiled. "But what are you doin' here all dressed up? Somebody die and leave you a fortune?"

"No. Right after the last time I seen you fellers I hooked up with the Cattle Association, and was lucky enough to clean up a couple of cow scandals. Had a little pull with a Senator, and got into the Government for a job. I've been with Uncle Sam nearly five years."

"Lookin' for mail rustlers?" asked Hashknife.

"Somethin' like that."

"Well, come on and have a drink," urged Zorn. "We ain't spent the price of one bronc yet, and we've got two to drink up before we can go home. Bartender, do your sworn duty."

"It's my turn," insisted Forrest.

"You ain't got no turn," Zorn replied. "Me and Sandy can't leave here with any money, and we can't drink it all ourselves. Point of honor with us, Mr. Forrest."

Zorn insisted on buying more drinks, but Hashknife and Sleepy decided that more was bad for their digestion; so, with Forrest and Reckless, they retired gracefully, leaving the two owners of the ZS outfit to argue with the bartender.

They walked to the sheriff's office, where they sat down and talked over old times. Forrest admitted that he

had been detailed to recover the registered mail taken in the recent robbery, but as yet had found no clue.

"Here's how it happened," he explained. "Thirty miles east of here is the little flag station of Saguaro. The agent swears the stop signal was not set. He was upstairs in his living quarters, heard the train stop but when he came down, it was pulling out.

"The train gets there about midnight. Usually the mail clerk just flings the little mail sack out on the platform. The pickup doesn't amount to much. In fact, there wasn't any sack on the rack that night. The train stopped, and as the clerk leaned out to drop the light sack, a man was right there at the door. The clerk says he thought it was the man who ordinarily picks up the mail; but this man came into that car like a cat, a gun in his hand, and behind him came another.

"I guess that both mail clerk and helper were half asleep. Anyway, these two armed men tied 'em both up tightly, helped themselves to everything in sight, pulled the air cord about a mile east of Vista, stopped the train and made a clean getaway."

"How much did they git?" asked Hashknife.

"I can't tell you that. We've had the agent at Saguaro on the carpet, but he swears he never set that flag signal. He thought they had stopped to discharge a passenger. The mail clerks can't give any definite description; too scared, I suppose."

"Nothin' to work on, eh?"

"Well, I haven't been able to discover anythin'."

A little later, as they walked up the street, Forrest became more confidential with Hashknife.

"I didn't want to say too much in public," he explained. "But as a matter of fact, the two biggest items of the robbery were a package of unset diamonds sent from a wholesale jewelry house in Los Angeles to a dealer in New York, and a package of currency. The diamonds were worth thirty thousand dollars, and the currency fifteen thousand, with no way of identifying a piece of it. A diamond is merely a diamond, below a certain size and weight; and these were all less than four carats in size."

"Looks like a professional job," decided Hashknife.

"Looks that way, Hashknife. But I don't believe they knew the diamonds were there. It was just a lucky strike, as far as that goes. If it was a professional job, they'd know how and where to get rid of the gems. But if it was merely a couple of ignorant robbers, they wouldn't have any idea where to market the stones. Our one chance is that the gems haven't been moved out."

Forrest and Hashknife passed Leta and Brick on the street and Forrest told Hashknife who Brick was. Hashknife had heard enough about him to be interested.

"That girl never got her complexion from an Arizona sun," declared Forrest. "Dresses like a city girl, too. Looks like a high stepper to me."

"Still interested in girls, Forrest?" bantered Hashknife.

"Not the way you think, Hashknife. Working on a case like this—and there's two men at the JT."

"You meanin' that mail car job?"

Forrest laughed shortly.

"I dunno. In my business you've got to keep your eyes open. I'm lookin' for somebody to come and get them sparklers—and a girl might. Have you met the Saint?

"I've seen him."

"Big man in Rimrock, they tell me. Sheriff introduced us, and asked him to help me. Leave it to a cow town sheriff to talk too much. I suppose everybody in town knows why I'm here."

"You might as well wear a sign on your back," stated Hashknife. "What did the Saint have to offer?"

"Nothin'. Oh, he was cordial enough. Sort of I'll-let-you-live-if-you-behave attitude. I hate these big men in small

places. He wears that big beard and long hair for effect. The Saint! Hell, if he ain't a sinner, I'm the king of Sweden."

WHILE they were talking, Andy Voss came along, swinging his heavy cane with the huge knob on the end and watching the front of the Silk Hat Saloon. Sleepy nudged Hashknife. The marshal of Rimrock City was keeping an eye on Zorn and Shores. He strolled past the saloon as the two men came out.

They stopped together and looked owlishly at the marshal, who said nothing. Zorn put one arm around Shores, and they laughed heartily while Voss scowled at them. Without a word they wandered across the street to the place where their horses were tied near the Silver Standard.

"What do you suppose Voss will do if they act wild?" queried Forrest.

"Who knows?" returned Hashknife.

Voss stopped at the edge of the sidewalk, gripping his cane in both hands. Zorn and Shores were having trouble with their horses at the hitch-rack.

Shores was the first to mount. He was riding a hammer-headed roan, and the animal whirled viciously, ramming Zorn's Roman nosed buckskin. But Zorn mounted gracefully, and none of them saw that he had flung out his rope, because they were looking at Shores and his bad-acting roan.

Suddenly Shores let out a shrill war whoop, slashed the roan with both spurs and came bucking straight across the street, with Zorn's buckskin swinging in behind him. Voss swore viciously and sprang into the street, whirling his cane aloft.

"Quit that, you danged fools!" he yelled at the top of his lungs. "Stop that horse from buckin', or I'll—"

The bucking roan narrowly missed him, and as he went back on his heels, waving the heavy cane, a loop of rope shot out from Zorn's hand. It was a long throw, timed perfectly, with a small loop. It dropped over that waving cane, tightened with a snap, and the cane of the marshal of Rimrock City went thirty feet in the air.

With a shrill cowboy yell, Zorn went racing down the street, the cane bouncing and flipping behind him; and behind him rode Shores on a roan horse which had suddenly quit bucking. They disappeared in a cloud of dust, leaving the marshal a little dazed and wholly vitriolic in his language.

"You won't have much cane left when they're finished with it," Forrest predicted.

The marshal glared at him and walked away.

The Saint and Topaz Allen had witnessed the fracas from the doorway of the Silver Standard Saloon. They had also seen Leta and Brick drive into town. A few minutes after Zorn and Shores had faded out in the dust, Leta and Brick came from the general store and got into their buckboard.

The Saint swore softly at sight of them.

"Brick would like to make trouble for you," said Topaz.

"Damn him, he better not try it."

The gambler looked at his employer, and a curious smile twisted his thin lips. He stepped closer and lowered his voice.

"Saint, how much would you be willing to spend to fix Brick Travis?"

"How much?"

"Yes, how much."

"How do you mean—fix him?"

"Put him away for a long time."

"How?"

"The less you knew about it, the better you'd feel, Saint."

The big man scowled at the gambler.

"How much money do you need, Topaz?"

"Oh, about five thousand dollars."

"Five thousand! Hell, I could hire forty gunmen—"

"I'm no murderer," interrupted Topaz. "And you'd get rid of that girl at the same time."

"I would, eh?"

"You sure would."

"Uh-huh." The Saint grunted thoughtfully. "You come out to the ranch tomorrow and we'll talk about this."

"Better have the money," advised the gambler. "You can't let things like this ride too long."

TO MEET Mrs. Santley was to realize that here was a woman who had not been born to be ruled by a mere man. Six feet tall, built like an Amazon, handsome in a huge way, she was the boss of S. P. Santley and the guiding hand in everything he did.

Rimrock City did not know her socially; she was not a sociable woman. It was Mrs. Stanley who had acquired the Silver Standard Saloon and Gambling House, and it was Mrs. Santley who hired Topaz Allen to manage the place, paying him a generous salary. Rimrock City did not know this. Every one gave credit to the Saint.

At times Mrs. Santley appeared in Rimrock City modishly dressed, imperious as a queen; at other times she wore dowdy old clothes—a flannel shirt, well-worn riding breeches and boots. Her mood seemed to change with her clothes, but at no time did she appear feminine.

Al Patton, who was more of a second boss than foreman, said he never did quite understand her.

"She can talk English and use words I never heard in my life; and she can talk profane, usin' every word I've ever heard, and then add some that nobody ever used before. I heard her say one day that there's two crimes worse than killin'. One is an unfaithful husband and the other is a damn liar. I don't say that the Saint is either; but I wouldn't be in his boots. A woman can be mistaken long enough to mop up on you."

Mrs. Santley was responsible for the well-constructed, well-painted buildings of the S-Bar-S. Down in his heart, the Saint would have preferred the old, sagging ranch buildings. And above all things, he hated to wipe off his boots before entering his own house.

On this particular day, Topaz Allen was to come out to the ranch and have a talk with the Saint, and Mrs. Santley's buggy team was ready for her to drive to Rimrock City. The Saint was nervous. He did not want his wife to see Topaz out there.

She was in the living room, drawing on a pair of gloves, as he came in.

"You're drinking too much," she said bluntly.

"I'm not drinkin' any more than usual, my dear."

"I said you were drinking too much. Stop it. What's been the matter with you for the last couple weeks? Something on your mind?"

"Why, not a thing."

She looked him over coldly.

"Did you buy that Blue Peacock stock from Scott?"

"No, I didn't," he replied. "I don't believe they're on the vein, and I told Scott—"

Her eyes hardened quickly.

"I don't care a damn what you told Scott. I told you to buy it. I never asked your opinion. I want that stock."

"Well, I'll buy it, but I don't see—"

"You don't have to see. The next thing I know, you'll be going down and making a deal with Travis to water our stock."

"Well, I don't see how else you'll—"

"Don't you?" Mrs. Santley nearly yanked the back off a glove. "You quit drinking so much whisky, and listen to me. Some day I'll fire you and hire a general manager. You know you haven't any right to decide for yourself, after I have given you an order."

The Saint flared for a moment.

"Why don't you go down there and run things yourself?"

"What do you mean?"

"You say you can do it better than any man. You stay here at the ranch all the time. I'll admit that I'm under your thumb. You can ditch me any old

time—you say. Why don't you go to town and mix with the people. You ain't got no women friends. Why, you don't know anybody. The way you keep away from folks is jist like you was scared somebody might see you."

Her eyes blazed dangerously, and the Saint backed away.

"It's all right," he said meekly. "I—I've thought that a long time."

"Thought what?"

"That you never wanted to meet folks. Why, you've never been farther away than Rimrock in years. It ain't right, Laura."

"Listen to me," she said coldly. "Let that be the last time you ever question anything I do. One more yap out of you, and you'll cease to be the big man of Rimrock. Quit drinking and hanging around the Silver Standard. The next thing I know, you'll be buying drinks for the girls, if you haven't already."

"No, I ain't," denied the Saint. "I'd be a sucker to do that, and have the news brought right to you."

"What do you mean by that remark?"

"Topaz Allen."

"What about Topaz Allen?"

"You hired him," said the Saint. "I fired him, and you hired him back the next day, at double his former salary. He knows that you own everything I'm supposed to own."

Mrs. Santley seemed at a loss to find fitting words for a reply. Finally she said—

"We'll take this up later; I'm going to town now." She walked out.

The Saint was the only one at the ranch when Topaz Allen arrived.

Jeff Zorn, riding through the hills, had decided to drop in at the S-Bar-S and have a talk with the boys. He rode in near the stable as Topaz Allen dismounted at the house; so Jeff sat down at the shady end of the stable to have a smoke. He was out of sight of the house, and did not see the Saint and Topaz coming down to the stable; but he heard their voices as they stopped in the doorway. The Saint's first statement caused Jeff to prick up his ears.

"It's better to come down here, Topaz."

"Nobody around here?" asked Topaz.

"Not a soul; everybody's gone away."

They began talking in lowered voices, but loud enough for Jeff Zorn to hear every word that was said. When the two men ceased talking and went back to the house he went to his horse and rode away, a queer expression on his lean, swarthy face.

TOPAZ ALLEN smiled to himself as he rode away from the S-Bar-S. He cared more for money than anything except topaz, and with money he could buy plenty of topaz.

"Both ends against the middle," he chuckled to himself. "And if I don't come out on top of the heap, I'm a bigger fool than I think."

Just outside Rimrock City he met Mrs. Santley. She drew up her team and looked him over curiously.

"Pretty hot for riding, isn't it?" she commented.

Topaz smiled.

"Oh, I don't mind the heat; it keeps me from getting fat."

"Yes, you need to reduce," she said sarcastically. "Topaz, what was the idea of you telling Santley all you know?"

"I'm afraid I don't quite follow you," he replied.

"Don't pull that attitude with me, Topaz. Haven't I played square with you?"

"You should," he replied meaningly.

Mrs. Santley looked at him, a dangerous glint in her eyes.

"None of that. You play square with me, Topaz Allen."

"Pshaw, I was joking with you."

"No, you wasn't."

"Did you and the Saint have a run-in?" he asked.

"Never mind that part of it. He's drinking too much. He intimated that he keeps away from the girls at the Sil-

ver Standard because you'd spy on him for me."

"He's safe." Topaz laughed. "Laura, I often wonder why you married a big fourflusher like him. You don't love him."

"Don't I?" she flashed back at him. "You pinheaded tinhorn, what do you know about love? Is it any of your business who I love. He may be a big fourflusher, but I made him what he is. Anyway, he's worth a carload of crooks like you, Topaz."

Topaz flushed angrily, but held his temper.

"Excuse me," he said. "Sorry I spoke."

Mrs. Santley drew a deep breath and shook her head.

"I'm sorry I quarreled with you, but I mean what I say."

"Then, as I understand it, I'm to keep my mouth shut around the Saint. I could tell him plenty, you know."

Mrs. Santley's eyes narrowed dangerously.

"You try it!" she said. "One hint that you have talked to my husband, and I'll send you walking up the thirteen steps that lead to a noosed rope."

Topaz laughed shortly.

"Doesn't sound inviting, Laura. You have such a pleasant way of saying things. But I'm not talking. I've got an easy job, good pay, and I like the town."

"Take my tip and stick to the job, Topaz. What about the JT outfit?"

"Oh, that's working fine."

"Following out my orders?"

"Right to the letter. The Saint keeps growling about the JT, but I tell him to let 'em alone."

"What's wrong with my husband, anyway? He's nervous and surly. I wonder if he's drinking too much, or what?"

"I didn't notice it," lied Topaz.

"Well, I do. Is everything all right?"

"Fine. Andy Voss was kicking to the Saint about his salary. The town can only pay a hundred a month. Saint told him he couldn't do a thing for him. It isn't much money, you know."

"Give him fifty a month out of the till."

"That'll fix him up fine."

They nodded and rode one.

THAT afternoon Hashknife met Wick LeMoyne, owner of the Circle L outfit. Luke Haley, the sheriff, introduced them. LeMoyne was a big man, past the forty-year mark. He had a cold, calculating stare in his greenish-gray eyes and a wide mouth, thin-lipped and turned down at the corners. His harsh features seemed as inflexible as granite, but his voice was low-pitched and pleasant as he discussed range conditions with Hashknife.

"You're a stranger in this Rimrock country, ain't you, Hartley?" he asked.

"First time in here," replied Hashknife. "I understand that an old friend of mine, Harry Neil, was workin' for you, and killed himself."

LeMoyne nodded slowly, and his lips drew down a little.

"You knew Harry, didja? Too bad to cash in thataway, Hartley. He wasn't a bad sort of a feller, and he was a good hand."

"Too much liquor, I reckon," said Hashknife.

"I guess that's what the coroner decided."

"What was your opinion, LeMoyne?"

"I didn't have any. Here comes Jim Teele, one of my boys. Him and Neil bunked together. Jim, I want you to meet Mr. Hartley."

Teele was an undersized cowboy, with a long nose and a receding chin. His small eyes were nearly hidden under beetling eyebrows. He jerked to a stop three feet from Hashknife, and for a moment his mouth sagged. Hashknife stepped over quickly and thrust out his hand.

"Howdy," he said pleasantly.

Teele shook hands with him, but there was no pressure in his limp fingers.

"Jim bunked with Neil all the time he was with us, and mebbe he can tell you somethin'," said LeMoyne. "I'll see you later, Hartley."

"Thank you, LeMoyne," replied Hashknife.

The big cowman hurried on across the street. Hashknife watched him until he reached the front of a store and then turned to Teele, who was looking at him, his mouth twisted bitterly.

"Well," said Teele softly, "what about it, Hartley?"

Hashknife smiled slowly.

"Terry, how are you?" he asked.

"I've been all right for a year and a half," said the little cowboy sullenly.

"That's fine. Reformed, eh?"

"I said I'd been all right for—"

"A year and a half," finished Hashknife. "And I said that was fine. Wipe that scowl off your face, your little bat-eared roadrunner, and relax your elbow! If I wanted you, Terry, I'd take you."

Terry relaxed and nodded slowly.

"Yeah, I reckon you would."

"You're wanted for horse stealin' and cattle rustlin' in several places, I reckon; but as far as I know you've never murdered anybody."

"Honest t' Pete, I never did, Hartley!"

"What about Harry Neil?" snapped Hashknife.

The little cowboy stared at him blankly for several moments.

"Well, what about him, Hartley?"

"Who killed Neil, Terry?"

"He wasn't murdered, Hartley; he shot himself."

Terry's voice and manner showed absolute sincerity.

"Are you sure of that?" Hashknife asked.

"Well, my golly, there never was any question about it, I don't guess. Harry and me bunked together on the Circle L, and he was a fine boy. No, Hartley, you're barkin' up the wrong tree this time."

"I reckon I am," replied Hartley.

Neither of them spoke for awhile, but the little cowboy shifted uneasily. Finally he asked softly—

"Well, do I rattle my hocks out of this country, Hartley?"

"Not on my account. I must remember that your name's Teele. What sort of a feller is LeMoyne?"

"LeMoyne is all right, Hartley. Say, it's shore nice of you to let me alone. When I seen you, I jist kinda caved in on m'self."

"You won't lose your job through me, Teele. But here's a question, man to man; if LeMoyne knew who you are, would it make any difference to him?"

"As far as I know, Hartley, LeMoyne is on the square, and I'm scared it would. If you're tryin' to put the deadwood on Wick LeMoyne for anythin', I'd bet you're wrong."

Hashknife nodded slowly.

"All right. How well do you know Santley?"

"Him and LeMoyne are jist like that," replied Teele, holding out two fingers close together.

"How about the Travis bunch?"

The little cowboy shrugged his shoulders.

"*Quien sabe?*"

"The ZS outfit?"

"A couple damn range comedians, Hartley. Drink up every dime they can find, and make trouble for the city marshal."

"I guess that's all, Teele, thanks."

"Thanks to you." Teele grinned. "Come out and meet the boys."

"Mebbe we'll do that."

Hashknife found Sleepy and told him about meeting Jim Terry, now known as Teele. Sleepy grinned widely.

"Well, the little sticky rope! You scared him, eh? Fine! It's all right as long as he behaves himself. I don't believe in houndin' a feller. Let him make good; it's all right with me."

Hashknife wrote a letter to the secretary of the Cattlemen's Association, giving him all the data he had been able to collect. He was nearly convinced that Harry Neil had killed himself; but there was still a lingering doubt in his mind.

Bob Forrest, the special investigator, was still in Rimrock City; but he admitted to Hashknife that he had made little progress. Topaz Allen was away on a trip, and some one said he had gone to Phoenix. Several days passed without anything happening in Rimrock City.

Sleepy wanted to move on.

"We drawed a blank down here, Hashknife," he declared.

"It shore looks thataway," admitted the tall cowboy. "Let's me and you ride down to the JT ranch. We ain't never met the Travis outfit, and I'd kinda like a chance to size up that girl. I've found out she had a talk with Topaz Allen and the Saint on the night she came here. Forrest got that information from Topaz himself, but Topaz never told him what was said or why she talked with them."

"Let's go," agreed Sleepy. "I'm tired of this mine smell around here, and I'd rather see a cow than a slug of silver."

They saddled their horses at the stable and rode out of town.

BRICK TRAVIS sat on the corral fence and gloomily thought over the situation. Tomorrow would be Saturday, and Leta was going to take the 8:00 P.M. passenger for San Diego. Brick didn't want her to go, for the simple reason that he was in love with her. Ma Travis knew it, and Jim Travis guessed it; but Leta seemed blissfully ignorant. She went singing around the house or helping Ma Travis, who had tried to convince her that she should stay in Arizona.

"I can't do that, Ma," she explained.

"But what will you do in San Diego, Leta?"

"I don't honestly know what I'll do. I know some people there, and I'll get a job."

Ma Travis shook her head dubiously. She knew little of the city; but she did know it wasn't right for a pretty girl to be there alone.

"I hate to think of you goin' back, Leta," she said. "This house will be awful empty. We're goin' to miss you a lot more than you'll miss us."

"Don't say that, Ma. You have all been so wonderful to me, and I'll never be able to repay you. I love this old place and all of you."

"Why, bless your heart, you don't owe us anything, Leta. And I know we all love you—even Brick."

Leta blushed.

"That may be a secret from you, but not from me," continued Ma. "I can read that son of mine pretty well. Before you came he went to Rimrock nearly every night. And with the feeling of the S-Bar-S and the Circle L against us the way it is, I don't think Rimrock is a safe place for Brick at night. I've begged Jim to make his peace with Santley and LeMoyne, but Jim's stubborn."

"I might come back," said Leta slowly. "I got a letter from the lawyer this morning. I wrote him about things. I'll let you read it and see what you think."

Leta searched her handbag and her room, but was unable to find the first page of the letter. It was not in the envelop. And the reason why she could not find it was because, at about this time, Hashknife Hartley swung down off his horse and picked it up from a deep rut in the road. Apparently Leta had dropped it as she was replacing it in the envelop, and the rear wheel of the buckboard had flattened it in the rut.

Mere curiosity had prompted Hashknife to pick it up, and now he smoothed it out on his saddlehorn. The letterhead was that of a San Diego attorney, and it was directed to Miss Leta Santley, care of the JT ranch, Rimrock City, Arizona. It read:

My dear Miss Santley:

Apparently S. P. Santley has some reason for denying your relationship to him; but as far as those lost papers are concerned, they are merely copies. You have conclusive proofs in those old letters, marriage certificate, etc. The fact that Santley wired money to your mother is sufficient proof.

A hasty check of the various residences of

Mr. Santley during all these years shows no record of his ever having secured a divorce.

As you realize, your mother left very little money and no property. I gave you the balance when you left here, and I have paid for this search myself. I hardly know what to advise. If he persists in denying that you are his daughter, as you are not yet of legal age it seems to me you should employ some local attorney to force him to allow for your support. It also seems to me that, as far as I have been able to discover, he could be charged with big . . .

And that was all; there was no second page. Hashknife read it aloud to Sleepy, who rolled a cigaret, looked wise and wondered what it was all about.

"I've got a hunch it's that girl at the Travis ranch," said Hashknife. "This letter kinda accounts for her havin' that talk with the Saint the night she came here. Huh! That last line looks as though it was busted off on the word bigamy. Anyway, it sounds interestin'."

Hashknife folded the letter, shoved it deep in his pocket, and they rode on to the JT.

They found Brick and his father, who had finished corralling several head of horses and were watching them from the fence. Brick had seen the two strange cowboys in Rimrock City, but thought they were riding for the S-Bar-S. That was why he looked narrowly at them, wondering what they wanted at the JT.

Hashknife introduced himself and Sleepy.

"Did the Saint send you down here?" inquired Brick.

"No," Hashknife drawled, "he didn't have anythin' to do with it. In fact, we don't take orders from Santley."

Brick relaxed and leaned against the fence to roll a smoke.

"My mistake," he said pleasantly. "Nobody told me you was workin' for him; I jist guessed at it. You ain't with the Circle L?"

"Nope; we ain't workin' for no cow outfit, Travis."

"Uh-huh. Well, get down and rest your broncs. Ma will have dinner ready for us in no time."

"That sounds good." Sleepy grinned.

Hashknife squatted on his heels against the fence and drew out his tobacco and papers. Brick was curious to know why they had come, but it was not range etiquette to ask that question.

"Did you know Harry Neil?" Hashknife asked.

"The cowboy who killed himself?" said Brick. "Oh, I knew him by sight. Worked for the Circle L—and we don't hitch very well with LeMoyne's outfit."

Hashknife lighted his cigaret and looked up at Brick.

"You folks losin' any cows or horses lately?" he asked.

Brick looked keenly at Hashknife and shifted his position as he drew deeply on his cigaret.

"How didja happen to ask that?" he queried.

"Quite awhile ago," said Hashknife, "you or your father sent in a complaint to the Cattle Association."

"Oh, yeah," said Brick softly. "Are you an Association detective?"

Hashknife shook his head slowly.

"Neil was," he said.

"Well, I'll be damned! Why do you suppose he killed himself?"

"Did he?" asked Hashknife.

"Well, didn't he?" countered Brick.

"I wonder if he did."

Brick drew a deep breath and hunkered down on his heels.

"That sounds interestin', Hartley," he said. "We felt that the Association had turned us down. Dad had an idea that —well, it don't matter. You see, Santley is a pretty big cattleman, and he's strong with the Association. We didn't know—here comes dad; I want him to hear about this."

Jim Travis came down from the house, and Brick explained what Hashknife had told him. The old man was interested.

For ten or fifteen minutes they discussed the situation. The horses had been taken away a few at a time, and it seemed that the rustlers took only the

best animals. Neither Jim Travis nor Brick had any sort of theory as to how a rustler could dispose of stolen horses.

"Across the Border?" Hashknife suggested. "It's less than ten miles from here."

"No market down there," objected Brick. "There's only the little adobe town of Santa Maria; and there ain't a Mex in the place with money enough to buy a burro. There's Ma callin' us to dinner."

Ma Travis shook hands with both the boys and introduced them to Leta.

"This little lady is from San Diego," explained Ma. "And she's goin' back tomorrow night on the eight o'clock train—if she has her way about it. But if she left it to us, she'd stay here a long, long time."

Leta smiled and shook her head.

"I have never met such wonderful people before," she told Hashknife. "I came here a stranger; and if I had been Ma Travis's own daughter she couldn't have treated me with more love and kindness."

Hashknife studied Leta during the meal. She did not look like a girl who might be involved in a crooked deal, and he did not believe that Brick Travis and his father were mixed up in the mail car robbery. But Hashknife was not interested in that end of the deal; he wanted to find out whether Harry Neil had really committed suicide.

He was satisfied that the Travis family had not known Neil was a cattle detective; and if they needed his services, there would be no reason for them to do him any harm. Neil had worked for LeMoyne and was killed while in Le Moyne's employ. There was a possibility that the Circle L and the S-Bar-S were trying to drive Travis out of business; and if Neil had discovered anything wrong, it might be that some one in either outfit had put him out of the way, making the death appear as suicide.

Hashknife and Sleepy stayed awhile after dinner before riding back to Rimrock City. Sleepy was enthusiastic over Leta.

"Doggone, she's shore a pretty girl," he said.

"She's pretty, and she seems nice." Agreed Hashknife. "Anyway, if I'm any judge, Brick Travis is plumb stuck on her; and she don't hate him enough to hit him when he's got his back turned."

THEY stabled their horses. Hashknife decided to have a talk with Dr. Townley, the coroner. Reckless Blair did not like Townley. He said Townley had studied to be a horse doctor, but switched his affections to human beings too late in life to know smallpox from boils.

Townley was a small, nervous person, addicted to loose, flowing ties and hard liquor. He had just finished dressing the hand of an injured miner when Hashknife walked in, and he needed a drink more than he needed another patient. He looked Hashknife over quizzically.

"What's wrong with you?" he asked gruffly.

Hashknife grinned at him and sat down.

"Jist keep your hand out of the pill bottle awhile, Doc," he said. "I merely wanted to ask you a few questions."

"I'm pretty busy."

"You're the coroner of this county, ain't you?"

"I am."

"Remember Harry Neil, one of the Circle L cowboys?"

"I do. He killed himself a few weeks ago."

"Are you shore he killed himself?"

"That was my theory, and the coroner's jury so found."

"Who was on that jury, Doc?"

"Let me see. There were Oscar Carlson, Tony Marsh, Ducky Drake, Al Patton, Topaz Allen and Tom Burch."

Hashknife smiled slowly.

"Two from the S-Bar-S, two from the Circle L and two from the Silver Stand-

ard Saloon. At least, I believe Tom Burch is one of the bartenders over there."

"What has that to do with it?" snapped the doctor. "They were handy at the time, and I don't see what difference it makes who was on that jury. What are you driving at; and who are you, anyway?"

"I'm a friend of Harry Neil's. At least, I was."

The doctor fidgeted in his chair, eyeing Hashknife curiously.

"You don't mean to imply that the inquest wasn't on the square, do you?" he asked.

"What caliber bullet killed Neil?" Hashknife asked, ignoring the question.

".38 Colt."

"Was that the size of Neil's gun?"

"Certainly."

"Did you dig out the bullet?"

"No, I did not dig out the bullet."

"How do you know it was a .38 bullet, Doc?"

"Well, Neil's gun was a .38, and one shell was empty."

"There was one empty shell in the gun, eh? One empty and five loaded?"

"That's right. I can show you the contents of that gun."

The doctor pulled out a drawer of his desk, drew out a heavy envelop, and dumped its contents on his desk. There were five loaded .38 caliber revolver cartridges and one empty shell. Hashknife looked them over carefully.

"Kinda funny," he said thoughtfully.

"What's funny?" asked the doctor.

"Five fairly new cartridges, all the same manufacture, and the empty one is an old one, made by a different manufacturer. Doc, as a matter of fact, you know the average man carries the hammer of his gun on an empty chamber or on an empty cartridge, don't you?"

"Well?"

Hashknife dumped the cartridges back into the envelop.

"Harry Neil was a cattle detective, Doc; he never shot himself."

"Who are you—another detective?" asked the doctor in sharp challenge.

"I'd like to find the man who murdered Neil. That's who I am."

"I don't envy you the job. But as far as the case is concerned, it is legally closed. The records show that Neil was a suicide."

"And it also shows that you were negligent," replied Hashknife. "You should have recovered that bullet."

The doctor got to his feet and leaned across the desk.

"I don't know who you are, and I don't care who you are," he said evenly. "I'm not accountable to every bush popper who shows up here. I'll run my business, and ask you to do the same."

"Thank you, Doc," drawled Hashknife. He walked out.

THE next day—Saturday—was the busiest day of the week in Rimrock City. It seemed as if everybody came to town to transact business on Saturday. All three of the Travis family came in, bringing Leta with them. They had decided to go back to the ranch in time for supper, and Brick was to bring Leta back to the depot at train time.

The Saint and his wife were in town, and they met Leta and Brick in front of the post office. It was the first time the Saint had seen Leta since that night in the Silver Standard.

"Howdy," greeted Brick. "Howdy, Mrs. Santley."

Mrs. Santley nodded coldly, her eyes on the girl. Suddenly she shot a side glance at her husband. Leta was looking at him with a peculiar expression in her eyes. It was only a flash as they passed, but Mrs. Santley noted it. The Saint had hesitated in his stride, started to look back, but turned and looked into a store window.

"Who is that girl?" asked Mrs. Santley.

"I dunno," grunted the Saint.

"Have you ever seen her before?"

"I dunno; I don't pay no attention to girls."

"I thought she was going to speak to you."

"I dunno why she would; I don't know her."

"Then she doesn't work at the Silver Standard?"

"No, she don't."

"You'd know her if she did, I suppose."

"I don't know any of 'em," protested the Saint. "You're always so suspicious, Laura."

"I have eyes of my own."

"Uh-huh. Well, you run along and do your shoppin'. I'll check up on things at the Silver Standard and be ready to go back when you're through."

"Isn't Topaz Allen back yet?"

"I ain't heard."

They separated, and Mrs. Santley went to do her shopping. The Saint cursed in his big beard and helped himself to several drinks of raw whisky. Down in his heart he knew Leta had told Brick Travis, and he wished he knew of some way to wipe that grin off Brick's face.

When Mrs. Santley came from the store, she encountered Brick Travis. He nodded, lifting his hat as he went past.

"Pardon me, Mr. Travis," she said, and he turned back to her.

"I was just curious to know who that pretty girl is," she said.

"Oh," Brick replied noncommitally, "she's a little lady from San Diego, Mrs. Santley."

"Is that so? What is her name?"

"Santley," replied Brick soberly. "Leta Santley."

"Santley?" The name was apparently a shock to Mrs. Santley.

"Funny, ain't it? Same name as yours," said Brick.

"Have you known her long?" Mrs. Santley asked.

"I never seen her in my life until last pay night," admitted Brick. "She came here alone, and she's leavin' tonight."

"I see," said Mrs. Santley thoughtfully. "Thank you very much."

"You're welcome." Brick smiled and hurried on.

He found the rest of the family ready to leave for the ranch. Mrs. Travis and Leta were riding in the buckboard with Jim Travis, and Brick rode his horse far in advance over the sandy road.

He stabled his horse and walked up to the house. The front door was open, and he distinctly remembered having shut it. Locks were unknown out on the range; but, with loose stock, it was good policy always to see that the doors were shut.

Brick walked up the veranda steps and into the living room, where he jerked to a stop, staring at a figure on the floor. It was a man wearing range clothes, flat on his back, arms outflung. Brick stepped in close and looked down into the face of Topaz Allen, the gambler. There was a stain on the breast of his pale blue shirt, and two bullet holes were plainly visible. His lips were drawn back in a snarl, eyes only partly closed; but he was dead, there was no question about that. His gun was still in its holster.

Brick drew a deep breath and stepped back to the doorway, looking quickly around. Topaz had not been dead long. But there was no one in sight. There was still an acrid odor of powder smoke in the room.

Brick went quickly through the house, but could see nothing.

He went back and looked at Topaz, trying to puzzle out what Topaz Allen had been doing there, and who had shot him.

He stepped back to the doorway, and his heart nearly stopped. Coming up toward the house, riding his pinto horse, was Luke Haley the sheriff, and not over a hundred yards behind him came the buckboard.

Brick sat down on the steps, his brow wet with perspiration, and tried to smile a welcome to the sheriff.

"Hyah, Brick,' said Haley. "How are you?"

"Me? Oh, I'm fine, Haley; how are you?"

"Good as usual, Brick."

He turned to watch the buckboard arrive.

"Hyah, Ma Travis," he called, "how are you?"

"Well, if it isn't Luke Haley!" exclaimed Ma. "You don't get out this way very often, Luke."

"Not very. I was over to the Circle L and jist dropped in on my way back."

Ma Travis introduced Leta, and the sheriff paid no attention to the name. Perhaps he didn't hear it clearly. Jim Travis shook hands with him.

"We came home early so we could have an early supper," said Ma. "You better stay for supper, Luke."

"No, I can't do it, Ma; thank you kindly. I'll be moseyin' along."

Ma went up the steps past Brick, and he grasped her skirt firmly. He didn't want her to go into that room—not while the sheriff was there. She looked curiously at him. The sheriff was talking with Jim Travis, and Brick whispered to his mother:

"Don't got in, Ma. Stay here until he goes."

Something in his eyes warned her that she must stop. Leta would have gone past her, but Ma blocked the way. Leta looked curiously at her, hardly understanding why one of Ma Travis's arms was holding her so tightly.

The sheriff turned from Jim Travis to the group on the porch.

"Well, I reckon I'll be driftin', folks," he said and rode away.

As he drew farther from the ranch, Brick got to his feet, his mouth set grimly.

"Ma, you and Leta keep out of the living room," he said. "There's a dead man in there. Topaz Allen."

Jim Travis came slowly up the steps, staring at Brick.

"What was Topaz Allen doin' here?" he demanded.

"I don't know, Dad. Come in with me. Ma, you and Leta stay out."

The two men examined the corpse, then went back to the porch. Ma and Leta, white faced, were waiting for them.

"Brick, did you shoot him?" asked Ma.

"I reckon I'd have a hard time provin' I didn't, Ma."

"I don't believe you did, Brick."

"Naturally I didn't," replied Brick. "He was dead when I found him. But he ain't been dead long. Lord, I was afraid the sheriff would find him! Don'tcha see, he never even drew a gun. Somebody murdered him."

Jime Travis shook his head, putting a hand on Brick's shoulder.

"I wish you'd have told the sheriff, Brick. Don'tcha see how much worse it's goin' to look? You've got to tell him the story."

"Mebbe I should have told him. But look at it right, Dad. Topaz never had a chance to draw a gun and I was the only one here."

"Your gun wasn't dirty, Brick."

"I didn't clean it the last time I fired a shot," he said. "As far as that goes, I could have cleaned it after shootin' him. I tell you, I didn't know what to do, and I don't yet. But I know one thing to do, and that is to see that Leta gets safely on a train. After that, I'll tell the sheriff."

"I'm not going to go away—not now," stated Leta firmly.

"They'd bring her back for a witness," said Ma wearily.

"We'll have to take that chance, Ma," said Brick. "Mebbe they won't bring her back. Anyway, she'd be no good as a witness. Oh, why didn't I get back here a few minutes earlier and see who was here with Topaz?"

"But we all know you didn't kill him," said Ma.

"But how could I ever prove I didn't? I'm stuck now. I've got to tell the sheriff, and my story is goin' to sound mighty lame to a judge and jury. I was alone when I found him, and I had time to kill him."

"You might have been justified, at that," drawled a voice from the doorway, and they turned to see Hashknife.

They were badly startled, and showed it.

"For heaven's sake, when did you get here?" blurted Brick.

"Oh, I just drifted in. You folks was so busy talkin' that you didn't see me. I seen the sheriff, but he didn't see me. Huh!"

HASHKNIFE came in slowly and looked down at the body. He knelt down and looked it over carefully, finally removing the gun from the holster. It was fully loaded; the barrel was clean. Hashknife got to his feet with a grim smile on his wide mouth.

"Was Topaz Allen in the habit of visitin' you out here?" he asked.

"He was here once, nearly a year ago," replied Ma Travis.

"I asked about him at the Silver Standard today, and they said he wasn't back yet from Phoenix."

"But what do you think of this deal, Hartley?" asked Jim Travis nervously.

Hashknife rolled a smoke and then inhaled deeply. He looked at Leta, his gray eyes curious.

"You was plannin' on leavin' tonight, wasn't you?" he asked.

"Why, yes, I—"

"Uh-huh. Are you all packed up, ready to leave?"

"She packed her valise this mornin'," volunteered Ma Travis.

Hashknife blew a thin stream of smoke through his nostrils.

"Lemme see that valise, will you?" he asked.

Brick brought the valise. It was fastened with straps and the clasps at the ends, but was not locked.

"Open it," said Hashknife. He turned to Leta. "You don't mind?"

"Why, not at all, Mr. Hartley."

Brick opened it. The contents were well packed. Hashknife lifted them out carefully, looking between each garment. There was an envelop-like compartment which bulged a little. Hashknife opened the flap and drew out a little buckskin bag tied tightly at the top.

"What in the world is that?" gasped Leta. "It isn't mine!"

Hashknife squinted away from the smoke of his cigaret as he unfastened the top of the bag. He dumped the contents into his hand and held them out for all to see.

"Diamonds?" gasped Leta. "Why, I never had any diamonds!"

"Don't they sparkle pretty?" asked Hashknife. "I'd say there was several thousand dollars' worth."

He got to his feet and dumped the sparklers back into the little bag.

"Is anythin' missin' out of your bag, Miss Santley?" he asked.

Leta dropped on her knees and went swiftly through her belongings. Then she got to her feet, her lips shut tightly for a moment.

She turned to Ma Travis and said, "Those letters and the marriage license are all gone."

Ma put an arm around Leta and patted her on the back.

"Was they the papers that could prove S. P. Santley was your father?" asked Hashknife.

"Say!" blurted Brick. "Do you know everythin', Hartley?"

"It was a hunch of mine. You see, if Miss Santley had started for San Diego, she'd have been taken to jail because a detective and the sheriff would have searched her valise at the depot."

"You knew this?" Brick asked.

Hashknife reached for his tobacco and papers again, deftly rolling a fresh cigaret.

"The detective is a friend of mine," he said. "I saved him from makin' a big mistake. I didn't know those diamonds was in that valise; I jist wanted to be sure they wasn't."

"And how on earth could I have proved that the diamonds did not belong to me?" asked Leta wonderingly.

"You couldn't," said Hashknife. "You see, in that mail car robbery a lot of diamonds were stolen."

"Two men," Brick said slowly. "Hart-

ley, they'd have arrested dad and me."

"Shore would."

"Well, good heavens!" exclaimed Ma Travis. "I never heard of such things."

Hashknife walked to the door and looked out. The sun was a half hour from the horizon. He came back to them.

"Mrs. Travis, you go ahead and cook supper," he said. "Forget this. After supper your son can take Miss Santley to the train."

"I'm not going," declared Leta. "I'm going to stay and see this through."

"You're goin' to the train," said Hashknife. "Let 'em search your valise. Then you can cash in your ticket and come back. You see, I want to dispose of Topaz Allen after dark, and I don't want no danged officers down this way. If you don't show up at the depot, they might show up down here."

"We'll do that," said Brick quickly. "Good gosh, I'd do anythin' you tell me, Hartley."

"Well," said the tall cowboy seriously. "It's a lot easier to help folks keep out of trouble than it is to git 'em out afterward."

"How are you goin' to dispose of this body?"

"As a matter of fact—" Hashknife grinned—"the law don't know that Topaz Allen is dead. Don't worry, I'll put him away where they'll find him; and they'll be danged sure he died there, too."

After the women were in the kitchen, Hashknife searched Topaz Allen, while Brick and his father looked on. There were several letters, a gold handled pocketknife and about thirty dollars in money. Hashknife glanced through the letters, but found nothing. One folded sheet of paper contained a few penciled lines which read:

> Can get 100 for 20 more before 10th. After that N. G.

There was no signature. Hashknife kept that paper and replaced the rest. He examined the man's chaps, spurs and belt with close attention to detail.

"Didja ever see him in this outfit before?" asked Hashknife.

"I never did," declared Brick. "He never rode much, and if I remember right he wore fancy chaps, and his gun belt was all carved."

"Good!" exclaimed Hashknife, but they didn't know why he said that.

AT QUARTER of eight that evening Bob Forrest and the sheriff descended upon the Rimrock City depot, found Leta and Brick in the waiting room, and demanded that Leta open her valise for their inspection. The search was vain, however, and Forrest was profuse in his apologies.

After they had gone, and before the train arrived, Leta asked the agent to redeem her ticket since it was impossible for her to use it. And then they rode back to the ranch in the moonlight, wondering what the next move would be.

It was after ten o'clock when Hashknife got back to town. Sleepy was worried over his absence, but the tall cowboy did not explain where he had been. The Saint was in the Silver Standard, talking with Forrest, when Hashknife and Sleepy came in. Forrest spoke to them, but the Saint ignored them entirely as they came up to the bar.

"Where's Topaz Allen?" Hashknife asked the bartender.

"He went to Phoenix and ain't back yet," replied the bartender.

Zorn and Shores were there, and came up to the bar. They had been drinking, but were not drunk.

"Well, I guess I'll fold me up a little sleep," said Forrest, and sauntered out.

Jeff Zorn looked after him curiously, then turned to Hashknife.

"They tell me he's a Government detective, Hartley."

"Yeah, I reckon he is, Zorn."

"Is he a good one?"

"I dunno much about his reputation

on anythin' except range stuff. He was a pretty good man with the Association."

"Yeah? Was he a cow detective?"

"Shore."

"Oh, I thought he was jist sort of a city detective."

The Saint wandered away from the bar. Zorn looked after him. Presently Zorn and Shores went over to watch the roulette wheel. The bartender said to Hashknife—

"You was speakin' about Forrest bein' a cattle detective."

"Yeah, he used to be," said Hashknife.

"I know it. Awhile ago he was talkin' to Zorn and Shores, here at the bar, and he told 'em that you was the smartest cattle detective he ever knew."

Hashknife thought it over for several moments. Then he grinned.

"Forrest always was one of the dangdest liars I ever knew. He'd be jist as liable to make me out a bank president or a whisky distiller. Anythin' that comes to his mind, he speaks out."

"He said it with a straight face, Hartley."

"That's what makes him a great detective," said Hashknife.

That night in their room at the hotel Sleepy asked Hashknife where he had been, and Hashknife told him he had been down at the JT ranch. He didn't say anything about the murder or anything else that had happened.

"I was down in the sheriff's office this evenin'," said Sleepy, "and the coroner comes in to see the sheriff. That little pill peddler is sore at you, don'tcha know it? He said you got awful fresh, tellin' him what he should have done on that Neil case. He told the sheriff that you said Neil never shot himself.

"What did the sheriff have to say?" asked Hashknife.

"Well, the doctor said you accused him of bein' negligent; and the sheriff said mebbe you was right, but that the case was closed. He said that even if Neil was murdered, nobody could ever prove it now. The little doctor was pretty full of hooch, and he went away talkin' to himself. The sheriff asked me what the hell you wanted to stir up all this fuss for, and I said he'd better ask you."

"I guess he has his troubles," reflected Hashknife. "If he hasn't, he will have soon."

The Saint came to town early the next morning. He'd had a bitter session with his wife over the identity of Leta, and he was in a murderous frame of mind toward Brick Travis. He met Luke Haley, who volunteered the information that he and Forrest had searched the girl's valise at the depot, but found nothing.

"Did she pull out on that train?" asked the Saint.

"I reckon she did; she had a ticket."

At least there was some balm in Gilead for the Saint. With Leta out of the country, he could breathe easier. Hashknife and Sleepy came down to breakfast and were eating in a Chinese restaurant when Reckless Blair came hurrying in. He had seen them enter the restaurant.

"Topaz Allen is dead!" he yelled to them. "They found his body down near the depot, shot twice. Want to go down with us?"

They did. The sheriff loaded them all in an old dray, and the driver galloped the team down the rough road.

It was a wild ride, with a wild driver. They found the Saint and several other men already there. Some one brought the coroner in a buggy, and every one kept away from the body until he arrived.

Topaz was lying on a sloping bank beside the railroad track, about fifty feet east of where the wagon road crossed the tracks. He was flat on his back, arms outflung, a gun clenched in his right hand—a gun with a blackened bore and two empty shells in the chamber.

Hashknife watched the expression on the Saint's face as the sheriff and coroner made their examination. The

Saint seemed to be puzzled rather than shocked, and he came in close when the sheriff made a search of Topaz's pockets.

"It wasn't no robbery," said the sheriff. "I don't quite understand it m'self. Saint, wasn't Topaz supposed to be in Phoenix?"

The Saint nodded.

"Gun's been shot twice," said Reckless. "Must have been quite a battle."

Hashknife moved in close and looked at the two wounds. The coroner gave Hashknife a malevolent glance.

"Apparently this feller shot first," said Hashknife.

The coroner and sheriff looked at Hashknife curiously.

"You might explain your reasons for making that statement," the coroner said.

"It's right in front of you, Doc. Take a look at either of them bullet holes, and tell me if Topaz could have fired a shot after they hit him."

"That's right!" exclaimed Reckless. "Both burned his heart."

"Ye-e-es, I believe you are right," said the doctor grudgingly, then added, "Well, we better take the body back to town. No use standing around here. It seems that Topaz Allen and some unknown person met and shot it out. The evidence shows that Topaz shot first. I guess we can carry him over to the dray, boys."

It amused Hashknife. If they had only known the trouble he had in bringing the body from the ranch and placing it there! He had fired the gun twice at the ranch, then had placed it in Topaz's stiffened fingers. If the coroner and sheriff had been as keen on details as Hashknife, they would surely have noticed that there was no blood on the ground.

Hashknife was unable to decide whether the Saint was worried or merely shocked. That big beard concealed most of his face, but Hashknife thought he detected a flash of fear in his eyes. Except for Hashknife, they were all puzzled over how Topaz happened to be there. And as far as the sheriff's office was concerned, it would always be a puzzle. But Sleepy knew Hashknife had had something to do with it. He had followed his lanky partner through the working out of many a problem, and he had learned to use his eyes.

They went up to their room, where Sleepy asked Hashknife if anybody helped him place the body beside the tracks.

"Nope," answered Hashknife. "It shore was a job."

Hashknife proceeded to tell Sleepy everything that happened at the JT ranch.

"What's the answer?" queried Sleepy.

"We ain't got that far yet. I've got the diamonds and somebody has the girl's papers. She's the Saint's daughter as shore as shootin'; but for some reason he don't dare admit it. That letter showed that there was no record of him ever havin' been divorced from Leta's mother, and mebbe he's afraid of bigamy."

"Scared of his wife more likely, Hashwife."

"Mebbe. By golly, I wonder if he is. There's a lot of angles to this case, Sleepy, and one of 'em may lead us to the killer of Harry Neil."

BRICK came to town after Topaz's body had been brought back. He heard all about the killing. In fact, it was the only topic of conversation. In the Silver Standard he met Forrest.

"If I'd known you'd still be here, I'd have brought my valise," teased Brick. "Anythin' to make you happy, you know. And if you've got a few seconds to spare, I'd like to know jist why you and the bat-eared sheriff searched that girl's valise."

Forrest didn't want to tell him, but there was something in the redhead's eyes that told him he better talk about it.

"I'd talk, if I was you," said Brick

slowly. "I never like to start anythin' when a lady is around. But I'm alone now, and I want to know."

Forrest led him outside the saloon and told him about the stolen diamonds, but did not say how many were stolen.

"I reckon I git the idea." Brick nodded. "You suspected that me and my dad robbed that car, and that the girl came to take the diamonds away with her."

"In my business, you can't afford to overlook anythin'," said Forrest. "The stones wasn't in her valise; so that lets you out, Travis. We apologized, and that's all we could do. It was our mistake."

"Tell me somethin', will you?" asked Brick. "Did you figure this all out for yourself, or did somebody else kinda drop a hint?"

"Well," countered the detective, "I reckon I figured out most of it."

"Meanin' that somebody did hint, eh?"

"I didn't say that, Travis."

"All right. Kinda funny about Topaz Allen, wasn't it?"

"It looks as if he ran up against a snag. Are you too sore to have a drink with me?"

"Oh, I ain't sore at you, Forrest. You told me why it was done, and that's all I wanted to know. You see, I wanted to explain it to the lady."

"I see. She left for San Diego last night, didn't she?"

"No, she's still out at the ranch."

"Well, she had a ticket," said Forrest.

"You can always cash in a ticket."

Forrest scowled at his reflection in the back-bar mirror. He could see the glint of amusement in Brick's eyes. Forrest started to ask a question, but shut his lips tightly. He almost asked Brick if he had known they were going to search Leta's valise at the depot.

Brick grinned and lifted his glass.

"Well, here's luck, Forrest. I reckon I know what you was thinkin', but you was only half right."

"Half right?"

"Shore. We never had those diamonds, but we did know you was goin' to make that search."

"How did you know that, Travis?" snapped Forrest.

"You're a detective—find it out," Brick laughed, and left the puzzled detective standing at the bar.

He was still standing there when the Saint came from the private office. He stopped to speak with Forrest.

"Wasn't Brick Travis in here a few minutes ago?" asked the Saint.

"Yeah, he was in here," replied Forrest sourly. "I wish you'd tell me how he knew we were goin' to search that girl's baggage last night."

"Did they know it, Forrest?"

"I guess they did. Somehow, I figure they outsmarted me, Saint. That girl let us search her baggage, and then she cashed in her ticket."

"Cashed it in? What do you mean?"

"She's still out at the JT ranch."

"The hell she is!"

Forrest laughed and relaxed against the bar.

"Why are you so interested in her?" he asked.

"Here comes that damn Hartley!" grunted the Saint evading the question.

Forrest grinned, turning to greet Hashknife and Sleepy. The Saint leaned his elbows on the bar, paying no attention to them.

"How's your luck, Bob?" Hashknife asked.

"Worse than that. Have a drink, both of you. Have somethin', Saint?"

"Nope," said the big man, moving toward the rear of the room.

"Well, what do you know about Topaz Allen?" asked Hashknife.

"What do *you* know?" Forrest countered.

"Well, I'm not a whole lot interested in Topaz Allen, Forrest. And I just wanted to say somethin' to you," Hashknife lowered his voice. "Don't never talk about me as a detective. You know I'm not in the business. Harry

Neil was a detective, and they murdered him. Your talkin' about me might get me what Harry got."

"Hell, I'm sorry about that, Hashknife. I had a drink too many and bragged, I guess. I'll keep my damn mouth shut from now on; but I'd back you against any cattle detective I ever knew. You've got brains."

"No, I ain't. If I had brains I'd quit foolin' with other people's business."

LATER in the day Zorn and Shores came to Rimrock City. Hashknife did not talk with them until supper time, when he and Sleepy met them in a restaurant. They were both cold sober.

"That was a funny deal—Topaz Allen gettin' bored thataway," said Shores.

"When you pull a gun, shoot straight," remarked Hashknife.

"Ain't that right!" exclaimed Zorn; he gave their order to the Chinaman and turned back to Hashknife.

"I guess he never showed up around here. He never got off the train down there. Anyway, he wouldn't be dressed thataway if he was just off a train. It was a funny place to pull off a shootin'. Must have been in the dark, too. Which reminds me I was talkin' to Luke Haley, and he said him and that detective searched a girl's valise down at the depot last night."

"How'd he happen to tell you that?" Hashknife asked.

"Oh, we was talkin' about it bein' funny that somebody didn't hear the shootin' down there, and he told about bein' down there about eight o'clock. I asked him what they searched the girl's valise for, and he shut up like a clam. Did you hear about it, Hartley?"

"Mebbe they was figurin' she was pickin' up dope from across the Border."

Shores agreed quickly—

"I'll bet that was it, Jeff."

"Do you reckon there's much dope comin' across the Border down here?" asked Sleepy.

"*Quien sabe?*" was Shore's answer.

"Santa Maria ain't much of a place, is it?" asked Hashknife.

"About the size of your hat," Zorn said. "Where's that chink? I need pie."

"When are you fellers comin' out to see our place?" asked Shores.

"I dunno," replied Hashknife. "We may get out there some day."

They drifted back to the Silver Standard after their meal. There were quite a number of cowboys in from the Circle L and the S-Bar-S. Brick Travis did not talk with Hashknife that day, because Hashknife had told him just to let things drift. Brick had gone home earlier in the day, and told the folks about the discovery of Topaz Allen's body.

Reckless joined them at the saloon, and Sleepy challenged him to a game of pool. Hashknife wasn't interested in the game, so he wandered down to the sheriff's office where he found Wick LeMoyne and Luke Haley. Both men were cordial enough, so Hashknife sat down with them, listening to their discussion of Topaz Allen's demise.

Sleepy discovered that Reckless was somewhat of a pool shark himself. The winning ball was still on the table. Sleepy was hunched beside the table, attempting a difficult bank shot, when a Mexican of the peon class shuffled in close to him. Sleepy glanced sidewise at him.

"Theese ees Mees'r Ortley?" the Mexican asked.

"Who?" asked Sleepy sharply.

"Mees'r Ortley?"

"You mean Hartley?"

"*Sí, sí!* Mees'r Ortley."

"No, sir," returned Sleepy, "I don't know where he is. What do you wan him for?"

"I 'ave nota for heem, señor."

"Note, eh? Give it to me and I'll see that he gits it."

"*Pronto?*"

"Huh? Oh, shore; jist as soon as I sink this shot."

The Mexican gave Sleepy a folded sheet of paper, then went shuffling away.

Sleepy made a two-cushion bank, racked his cue and went to search for Hashknife. The three men were outside the office and the sheriff was locking the door when Sleepy joined them. He touched Hashknife on the arm. They walked up to the hotel. Then Sleepy told Hashknife about the Mexican and gave him the note. It read:

> Hartley. Come out to the ranch right away if you can.
>
> —BRICK.

Hashknife studied the note thoughtfully for several moments.

"C'mon upstairs," he bade Sleepy. They went up to their room.

"Ain't you goin' out there?" Sleepy inquired.

Hashknife took a folded paper from his pocket and spread it beside the note he had just received.

"Look at them two, pardner," he said.

One was the penciled note he had taken from Topaz Allen's pocket, which read, "Can get 100 for 20 more before 10th. After that N. G."

The note from Brick was written in pencil, and the writing on both notes was identical. In fact, the paper was the same.

"Well, what does it mean?" queried Sleepy.

"It means that we don't go to the JT tonight, Sleepy. If Brick wrote both notes, he was mixed up with Topaz Allen, and I'm not a danged bit interested in him; but if he didn't write that first one, it means that the last one is a decoy note, and there's a few loads of buckshot waitin' along the road for me and you."

Sleepy grinned widely.

"Things are gettin' good around here. I'm goin' down and see if I can find that Mexican."

"You won't find him. See if Reckless knows who he is. He won't, but you might ask him."

Sleepy was unable to find the Mexican. Reckless said he hadn't recognized him as a local Mexican; there was quite a colony in the town. Sleepy's report to Hashknife was just what he expected it would be; and Hashknife knew that the Rimrock country would be a dangerous place for them now.

THE folks at the JT ranch were able to relax and sleep soundly after Brick had reported the mysterious demise of Topaz. They were naturally puzzled over the diamonds, and wondered if Topaz Allen had planted them there, and the following morning about ten o'clock Brick was leaning against the patio gate talking to Leta and his mother, when a cream colored team harnessed to a buckboard came in through the gate and circled up to the house. Brick drew a deep breath and hitched up his chaps.

"Mrs. Santley, or I'm a cow's ear!" he snorted.

"Well, my goodness! She's never been in my house in her life."

Mrs. Santley knocked several times before Ma Travis reached the door. She looked grimly at the smiling Mrs. Travis, and it was plain to see that Mrs. Santley was on no friendly mission.

"Well, well! I'm glad to see you, Mrs. Santley," said Ma.

"How do you do, Mrs. Travis," she replied coldly.

"Won't you come in, and—take that rocker, it's the easiest chair?"

Mrs. Santley accepted the seat, adjusted her skirt and stiffened her neck slightly as she said—

"I believe there is a young lady here who claims her name is Santley."

"Why, yes, there is," replied Ma Travis. "She's—"

"I would like to talk with her, if you please," interrupted Mrs. Santley.

"All right, certainly."

Leta came slowly from the patio and stopped just inside the door, steadily gazing at Mrs. Santley, whose cold eyes narrowed as she looked her over.

"Mrs. Santley, this is Miss Leta Santley," said Ma.

"How do you do, Mrs. Santley." Leta smiled, but the older woman did not acknowledge the introduction.

"Just who are you?" she asked, "and how does it happen your name is Santley?"

Leta looked at her coldly.

"Just who are you?" she countered. "And what right have you to come here and ask that question?"

"Check," said Brick, who was in the doorway.

Mrs. Santley stared at him.

"I should like to talk to this young lady in private, Mr. Travis."

Brick looked at Leta.

"Do you want to talk to her alone, Leta?"

"I don't believe I do," she said.

"All right, you're the boss."

"I asked a civil question," Mrs. Santley said.

"Yeah, and I'll tell you where you can get the answer—from your husband," Brick declared.

"Do mean that my husband knows her?"

"He ought to. He's her father."

Mrs. Santley jerked back in her chair, a look of horrified amazement on her face. Her eyes flashed to Leta, to Ma Travis, then toward the open door.

"I don't understand," she said slowly. "It can't be true."

Suddenly she got to her feet and turned to Leta.

"What proofs have you of this?" she demanded.

"None," replied Leta. "They have been stolen."

"Stolen?" Mrs. Santley looked at her closely. "You have no proofs at all?"

"Unless they are found or returned—none, Mrs. Santley."

Mrs. Santley smiled grimly and shook her head.

"What sort of game are you trying to play?" she asked. "No proofs! Did you expect to come here and blackmail my husband? "

"Is it blackmail for a daughter to claim her father?" asked Brick.

"In this case it would be!" snapped Mrs. Santley. "I am the only wife he ever had."

"Can you prove it, Mrs. Santley?"

"Certainly I can prove it," she replied. "And if this fool of a girl thinks she can get any money from S. P. Santley, she's badly mistaken. Just for your own information, young lady, I'll tell you that S. P. Santley hasn't a dollar of his own. I own everything. It was my brains and dollars that put him where he is today, and it's my brains that will keep that money."

"By golly, I was right!" excxlaimed Brick.

"Right in what?" asked Mrs. Santley, breathing heavily.

"I always said that the Saint didn't have brains enough to pound sand in a rat hole. No wonder he forgot to divorce his first wife before he married you.

Mrs. Santley stepped back, staring at Brick.

"What do you mean?" she faltered.

"Ask the Saint. I didn't mean to spring that on you, Mrs. Santley; but you come out here to browbeat this girl. You come out here to make her think that you and the Saint are the big guns of Rimrock.

"If you'd come out here, actin' decent, we'd have treated you right. I don't like to argue with a woman. You've done big things with the Saint. You've put him on a pedestal in Rimrock City, and you can tear him down awful easy. Keep him up there, if you want to. Leta don't need him—don't need his money. In fact, she don't want it. Now, what do you think of that?"

There was no rancor in Brick's voice. It was a long speech for him. The big woman looked at him a long time, then turned away. Things had soured for her, it seemed. She had wanted to own Rimrock City, the mines—everything. She had put Santley on a pedestal, never quite trusting him at any time, knowing deep in her heart that he was not big enough to stand alone. Brick was speaking, and she listened.

"You see," he said gently, "this hadn't ought to bother you. What if he was married before? It wasn't no sin. He ought to be proud of a daughter like Leta. She never took after him, that's a cinch—she's got brains.

Mrs. Santley smiled grimly.

"Go ahead and rub it in," she said.

"I'm sorry," apologized Brick.

"So am I," she replied slowly. "I—I guess I'll go back."

"Won't you come out to see us sometime again?" asked Ma Travis.

Mrs. Santley looked at her and drew a deep breath.

"No, I don't suppose I ever will; but you are very kind."

No one went out to the buckboard with her, but they stood in the doorway and watched her drive away. Leta's eyes were shiny with tears as they turned away from the doorway.

"I—I guess I'm sorry I ever came," she said.

"Don't you worry none about her," assured Brick. "That there female can shore take care of herself. Well, I'm goin' to town. Maybe I can find Hashknife Hartley."

"Bring both of them out to supper if they'll come," said Ma. "You tell Mr. Hartley I'm makin' some apple pies and biscuits."

THAT morning some of the Circle L outfit were in Rimrock City, and Hashknife took little Jim Teele, the ex-outlaw, aside for a talk. Hashknife felt that Teele did not dare lie to him.

"You bunked with Harry Neil, didn't you, Jim?" he asked.

"I shore did, Hashknife, and I never bunked with a better feller."

"Did you know Neil was an Association detective?"

Teele's eyes opened wide and he stared at Hashknife.

"Detective? Harry Neil? My Lord, no!"

"That's all right, Jim; I jist want you to answer a few questions."

"Ask 'em, feller."

"Is there any talk around the Circle L about puttin' the JT out of business?"

"Not that I ever heard. When Travis hit that artesian water, it raised hell with the Circle L wells. We're awful shy on water. The Saint got sore as hell and came out to talk with LeMoyne about it, because a lot of his springs went dry; but I never did know what they decided on.

"I never did hear LeMoyne say anythin' about puttin' the JT out of business. I did hear him sayin' that if it came to a showdown, he'd rather buy water from Travis than let his cows die of thirst. Personally, I think if it comes to a showdown, Travis will make an honest deal with 'em.

"Travis is all right. LeMoyne and the Saint have—well, mebbe it ain't none of my business—but you know how they could switch any buyer away from the JT. The buyers always come to the Saint first."

"I know how that sort of thing is done, Jim. Another thing, did Neil ever go down to Santa Maria, across the Border?"

"Yeah, he did, Hashknife. Neil was kinda funny thataway; he liked to drink pulque with the spigs. You know he talked Mexican. I went down there a couple times with him."

"When was the last time he was down there, Jim?"

"The night before they found him dead. I don't mean that same night. They found him in the mornin', but this was the night before."

"Was you in town with him the night he was supposed to have killed himself?"

"No, I wasn't. What do you mean—*supposed* to have killed himself?"

"I believe he was murdered, Jim."

Teele nodded slowly.

"I've believed it all the time, Hashknife. He wasn't the kind of a feller to shoot himself. But I couldn't see any reason for him bein' murdered, until you said he was a detective."

"And," asked Hashknife slowly, "do you know of any reason why a detective should be murdered around here, Jim?"

Teele shook his head in denial. "No, I don't. But if he was a detective, workin' at his job, mebbe he knew too much. I jist want you to know I'm playin' a square game out here, Hashknife. If I knowed of a crooked job, I'd tell you. Hell, I don't reckon I'd have to tell you; you'd know it ahead of me. And I want you to know that if you need a good gun and a man to fan it, jist yelp for me. I'd like to be on the right side once in my life."

"All right, Jimmy," agreed Hashknife. "I believe you. And if you ever git in a jam over what you done a long time ago, send for me."

"I shore will, thank you kindly."

Brick Travis came to town. He met Hashknife, who asked him if he had sent a note the previous night. Brick didn't know what Hashknife was talking about, so Hashknife showed him the note.

"Why, I never wrote that," said Brick. "It don't even look like my writin'. That's good writin'. Mine ain't."

Hashknife and Sleepy accepted Brick's invitation to supper; on the way down to the ranch Hashknife explained to Brick that the note was written for the purpose of decoying him and Sleepy away from town.

"You mean that somebody wants to put you out of the way?" asked Brick.

"That's the only reason for the forged note," said Hashknife.

"Well, have you any idea who it is?"

"Not exactly," replied Hashknife. "Do you know anythin' new?"

Brick told of Mrs. Santley's visit to the ranch, and what had been said.

"So Santley is merely a figurehead, eh? mused Hashknife. "She can shove him off his pedestal any old time. And he refuses to accept the girl as his daughter. By golly!"

Hashknife wrinkled his brow thoughtfully for a few moments, shifted in his saddle and began singing in his unmusical voice:

> "'Oh, bury me no-o-o-ot—', and his voice failed there—
> 'They paid no heed to his dyin' prayer.
> In a narrow grave jist six by three-e-e-e,
> They laid him there on the lone praiee-e-e.'"

Brick looked curiously at Hashknife, who stopped his song and reached for his tobacco. Sleepy shifted in his saddle, grinned slowly and rubbed the palm of his hand along the butt of his six-shooter. But neither asked Hashknife why he sang.

As they stabled their horses at the ranch, Brick said to Sleepy—

"Wasn't it kinda funny, him singin' thataway?"

"Hashknife ain't musically inclined, Brick."

"I noticed that," Brick replied dryly.

"But his song means somethin' to me. He always sings when the trail gets clear."

They found Hashknife in the patio, talking with Ma Travis and Leta.

"Tell 'em about that note, Hashknife," Brick said. "That's shore a funny deal."

Hashknife showed them the note and explained the writer's idea in sending it to him.

"Why, that's terrible!" cried Ma Travis. "You really believe they intended to murder you?"

Hashknife nodded gravely.

"But what made you suspicious?" Brick asked. "You don't know my writin'."

"Oh, jist a hunch," answered Hashknife. "I'd seen the writin' before."

"Where?"

"On a piece of paper I took out of Topaz Allen's pocket. The way he made a C at the beginnin' of each note was exactly alike. If you look at it close, you'll see he makes a capital C jist like the old copybooks showed us how to make a small C.

"But aren't you afraid to go back to town tonight?" Ma asked.

"Let's talk about apple pies and biscuits, Mrs. Travis. You see, they come first."

The decided to go about eight o'clock. Hashknife had already told Brick their method of leaving; after they had said goodby, they went into a dark bedroom on the opposite side of the house from the stable and slipped through an open window. They were taking no chances on some one's having seen them come out to the JT ranch that afternoon. It was very dark outside; with great stealth they led their horses outside. But instead of going toward town, they went out through a side gate and headed south. Brick had told them where to strike the old road to Santa Maria.

SANTA MARIA was not much of a town, even as Mexican towns go on that long stretch of Border. Not more than a dozen one-story adobe buildings on the Mexican side with a couple on the American side. The biggest cantina was not over a hundred feet from the sagging barbed wire fence which marked the Border.

No tourists came to Santa Maria. It was not a port of entry. There were no customs officers or roads below the town. Just a huddle of adobe, with a few Mexicans and poor white getting along. The lights in the cantina were the only ones in town as Hashknife and Sleepy rode in.

"Hell of a lookin' place," observed Sleepy, as they reined in past the fence and rode up to the cantina.

There was a team and a broken-down wagon, and two saddlehorses at the hitch-rack. One horse bore a Mexican saddle; the other had none.

"She don't look like much," admitted Hashknife.

They tied their horses loosely and went into the cantina. Four Mexicans were playing écarte, two more were drinking at a table, and the bartender was arguing with another at the bar. They all took a look at the two strange cowboys who walked up to the bar.

"Buenas noches," said the bartender.

"Buenas noches," replied Hashknife, giving the words the Mexican drawl, "Way-nas noshes."

"Tequila," said Sleepy, and Hashknife nodded.

They drank and surveyed the room. No one was paying any attention to them now. Hashknife's drawling reply to the bartender's greeting stamped him as a Border cowboy.

After a survey of the room, Hashknife turned to the bartender and spoke softly.

"Anythin' new?" he asked.

The man looked closely at him, shrugged his shoulders, but did not reply.

"Everythin' goin' all right?"

Another shrug.

"We're from down on the Yaqui River," offered Hashknife.

"Yaqui River, eh?" The bartender spoke passable English.

"Got a lease," lied Hashknife. "We want to be on the right side, you know. What do you know?"

"No mucho."

"You fellers ought to be on the right side," said Hashknife.

The bartender nodded thoughtfully. Hashknife was guessing. He had come down there to find out something. It was merely an idea—a long shot. The bartender looked at him.

"Where we are, you've either got to stay out or git in with the best side," said Hashknife.

The bartender swiped a rag across the top of the bar, leaned close to Hashknife and whispered a name—

"Oretaga."

Hashknife nodded and began rolling a cigaret.

"How soon?" he asked softly, not looking up.

"Quien sabe? Two, three weeks."

They filled their glasses and carried them over to a table behind the écarte game. Sleepy had heard what was said, but he hadn't the slightest idea what it was all about. The Mexicans at the card

game were arguing. The bartender carried a tray of tequila over to the table, and while he distributed the glasses two men came in.

One was a tall, thin Mexican wearing a brown shirt, riding breeches and cavalry boots. The other was short, slight, dressed in range clothes.

Sleepy leaned forward, looked searchingly at the small man, leaned back and whispered to Hashknife—

"If that ain't the Mex who gave me that note, I'll kiss a pig."

The two men didn't look over at Hashknife and Sleepy. They had several drinks and questioned the bartender, who shook his head. The tall one looked at his watch, spoke to the other, and they went out. Several more Mexicans came in; and while the bartender was busy with them, Hashknife led Sleepy out through the back door. There were no buildings behind the cantina.

They merely circled another adobe, walked through a narrow alley and found themselves on the main street again. It was a one-sided street, fronting the barbed wire Borderline. They could see two men at the front of the cantina, and Hashknife believed they were the same two who had been in the cantina.

"Well, what the hell are we doin' down here, anyway?" asked Sleepy. "Why all them questions you asked the barkeep?"

Hashknife and Sleepy were flattened against the adobe wall in the dark, invisible to any one a few feet away.

"Sh-h-h-h!" warned Hashknife. "Listen!"

Horses were coming over the hard packed road. The two men at the front of the cantina mounted horses quickly, and a few moments later a rider came through the opening in the fence. He was leading two horses, and behind him came a number of loose ones. Behind them came another rider. A dust cloud rolled up from the trampling hoofs, as the lead rider swung in past the front of the cantina. The two riders in front of the cantina reined in their horses until the rear rider came along. Then they joined him, and the cavalcade swung out of sight around the end of the street.

HASHKNIFE led the way swiftly to the hitch-rack, where he and Sleepy mounted their horses and circled the town from the opposite direction. One clear of the houses they stopped to listen. Hashknife laughed softly. Somewhere out there in the dark they heard curses, the snapping of a pole, the nicker of a horse.

"Corral out there, Sleepy," said Hashknife. "C'mon."

They circled at a slow walk, finally stopping. Some distance away they heard a man saying:

"Tie your rope on there in place of that busted pole. Hell, you won't need that rope again tonight."

Their eyes were more used to the darkness now, and ahead of them they could see the dark bulk of moving objects.

"All set?" asked a voice. "C'mon, let's go."

They could see the four riders get together, and the dull murmur of voices as they talked. One voice, louder than the rest, said something about a Ten Bar brand. Hashknife's horse wore the Ten Bar brand.

"Spotted us, Sleepy," said Hashknife softly as the four riders moved slowly back toward the street. "I was scared of that. It was a dang fool idea on my part to tie our horses where we did. I had an idea we might git a look at these *hombres,* but not now."

"Well, what's it all about?" demanded Sleepy.

"Stolen horses."

"Stolen horses? How do you know?"

"Guessed it. Listen, pardner; there wasn't no place they could steal horses and dispose of 'em across the line up there. Ordinarily you can't sell horses in Mexico. But if a revolution is brew-

in', you can usually git a good price from the rebels. That note said they could use twenty more at a hundred, if they got 'em before the tenth. This is the eighth."

"But how the devil did you know there was a revolution brewin'?"

"The bartender told me. He even told me Ortega was running' it. I had to have a revolution in order to have a market for them horses. Let's see if we can git a look at them."

They rode slowly over to the horses and found an old pole corral. The gate had been broken and was patched with a lariat. It was impossible to read brands in the dark, and the horses were tramping up a lot of dust.

"I'm jist wonderin'," said Hashknife, as he swung down and untied the gate.

"Head 'em toward town," he said. "I'll run 'em out."

He spurred into the corral, circled through the stifling dust, and the horses found the gate. Out they went in a stringing herd, and Sleepy swung in behind the rear ones, slashing with a rope-end, while Hashknife raced away on a right-hand point, forcing them to turn left at the adobe just short of the cantina.

There was a small adobe just beyond the gate, and Hashknife felt sure it would turn them through the opening. They went past the front of the cantina, showering the place with dust. A man yelled, and a horse, tied to the hitch-rack, snapped its tie-rope short. Two riders swung in from the left, and the herd swerved, as orange flashes licked out from a pair of guns.

Two horses crashed together at the gate, removing one of the posts, going down in a squealing heap, while the others jumped high and wide to clear their thrashing hoofs. Above the splutter of six-shooters came the whanging snap of a rifle.

Hashknife and Sleepy had no time to use their guns. They had flung their horses into the herd, swinging low, offering little target in that dark dust-fog. They were riding blind, trusting to their horses to make the sharp turn. Both riders were nearly thrown when their horses made the turn and hurdled the casualties at the gate; but they came through all right, and straightened up in their saddles a few moments later, racing along with the loose horses on the American side.

Quickly they reined in and came close together. Both men were momentarily winded.

"All right?" asked Hashknife anxiously.

"Fine as frog hair," panted Sleepy. "Man, we went some for a time there, didn't we!"

They galloped the herd for another mile. It was lighter now, and Hashknife took down his rope. Spurring in close to a winded horse, he dropped the loop over its head. After a short fight, the animal choked to a standstill, and Hashknife went down the rope. He lighted a match. Sleepy rode in close to read the brand.

"There's a JT on the right hip," he said.

The horse moved forward, and Hashknife lifted the loop over its head, letting it free.

"They're scatterin' all right," he said emphatically.

"Them horsethieves are goin' to be kinda sore, ain't they?" asked Sleepy mischievously.

"Losin' a couple thousand dollars might aggravate 'em. I figure Harry Neil went down there and found out too much. That's why he was sent down the long trail. Man, we was in a tight spot for a few seconds. Any jam at that gate, and we'd be ridin' south—or west. I had a vision of my horse missing that gate and goin' plumb through that little adobe. Some son of a gun was making good use of a rifle; didja hear him?"

"Hear him!" snorted Sleepy. "I've got a hole in the brim of my hat."

"Anyway—" and Hashknife laughed —"it was a lot of fun."

THE Saint was blissfully ignorant of the fact that his wife had been at the JT ranch. He talked with her that night about a chance to acquire control of the Silver Streak mining property, and the next day he went to Rimrock City to talk with the mine manager. The Saint had been gone but a few minutes, when Al Patton, one of the cowboys, came to the house carrying a badly soiled, sealed envelope with "S. P. Santley" printed in pencil on its face.

"It was on the bunkhouse floor," said Al, as he gave the envelope to Mrs. Santley. "Mebbe it was shoved under the door, I dunno."

As he went out, Mrs. Santley examined the letter. There was no address, no stamp, and the flap was poorly sealed. Al's remark about its having been shoved under the door interested Mrs. Santley, who carefully loosened the flap and drew out the enclosure, which proved to be a sheet of cheap paper on which words were coarsely printed.

WE HAV GOT SOM PAPERS YOUR WIFE MITE WANT TO SEE AND YOU CAN HAV THEM FOR 10 THOUSIND DOLARS. GO A LONE TO OLD CABIN IN CHERRY CANYON AND LEVE THE MONEY AND THE PAPERS WILL BE THEIR.

DO THIS TOMORO OR YOUR WIFE WILL GIT THE PAPERS AND DONT PACK A GUN OR TELL A SHERIF. THIS IS YOUR ONLE CHANCE TO GIT THE PAPERS. WE MEEN WHAT WE SAY SO DONT GIT FUNY.

—THE ONES WHAT GOT TOPPAZ ALEN

Mrs. Santley read it several times. In a way, it amused her—now. So there really must be proof of what Leta had told her. The girl had not lied when she said the proof had been stolen. The men who had murdered Topaz Allen were trying to blackmail the Saint.

He came to the house and told her he would not be home for dinner, explaining that the mine manager had been away, and that he himself must be in town by one o'clock. Mrs. Santley accepted his explanation, saying nothing, and he rode away.

After he had gone she sent word to Al Patton to have her horse saddled after dinner. She did not ride very often, but her private riding horse was always kept at the ranch.

The Saint rode back to Rimrock in a cloud of profanity. A dozen schemes flashed through his mind, only to be rejected. He did not dare ask help from the sheriff. Not only because of the warning, but because he did not want the sheriff to know about the papers. Ten thousand dollars was too much for the Saint to draw from the bank.

The first man he saw as he rode into town was Forrest, the detective; the Saint suddenly hit upon an idea.

He took Forrest into the private office of the Silver Standard, asked the bartender to bring in drinks, gave Forrest a cigar, and then grew confidential. He did not tell Forrest what was in those papers, except that they were valuable enough for the blackmailers to name a price of ten thousand dollars.

Forrest read the note carefully.

"It doesn't say how you will receive the letters," he observed. "I don't suppose a man will be there to make the exchange with you. It seems to me that they are trusting you in this matter. You take the money there and find the papers in the cabin.

"I suppose the idea is for you to carry the money in sight, and go unarmed. Hm-m? Where is Cherry Canyon?"

"Northeast of my place. The cabin is almost due east. It's down in the canyon in a clearing which is about a hundred yards square."

"Have you any ideas?" asked Forrest.

"Not a damned idea," said the Saint miserably. "I can't get that much money, Forrest."

"I see. And you can't afford to have your wife see those papers."

"You're damn right, I can't!"

"I guess your only chance is to make up a dummy package, take a chance that the papers are there, and get them long enough to destroy them. These blackmailers may murder you for revenge, of course; but you'll have to take that chance."

"I'd take a chance on that. But suppose one of 'em is there to make the exchange?"

"That would be tough for you. But you can carry a hidden gun. If they thought you were unarmed, you'd have an advantage."

"I guess the dummy package and the hidden gun idea is a pretty good one," remarked the Saint.

HASHKNIFE and Sleepy had saddled their horses that day to ride out to the S-Bar-S. Hashknife was curious to see the place and to have a chat with the Saint; but as they came from the livery stable the Saint rode into town.

Nevertheless, they traveled out along the S-Bar-S road to where it forked to the ZS ranch, and decided to ride out to visit Zorn and Shores. The ZS was a tumbledown layout with a certain picturesque appeal. They found Shores at home. He said Zorn had ridden over to Vista that morning. Shores made them welcome and cooked dinner for them. He apologized for the lack of something to drink, and promised to have it the next time they came out.

"Jeff will prob'ly bring some from Vista," he said. "But he won't be back very early. Anyway, he'll have his skin full; he allus does."

"The cattle and horse business ain't much good these days, is it?" asked Hashknife.

"You ain't said half of it, Hartley. Me and Jeff jist git along by the skin of our teeth. You see, this would be all right if it wasn't for LeMoyne and Santley. They run things. If a buyer shows up, they steer him away from us or the JT. Hell, you can't exist thataway."

They ate dinner and talked awhile, after which Hashknife and Sleepy rode toward Rimrock City. But when they were a half-mile from the ZS, Hashknife decided to see what the range looked like. So they rode through the hills toward the S-Bar-S.

The brush was quite thick, but a winding cattle trail led them down to Cherry Canyon. They did not know its name, but rode to the southeast, along the rim, seeking a trail into the canyon. Since the going was rather hard, they rode out to an open spot on the rim to see if they could locate a trail on the other side in order to get into the canyon.

"There's a cabin down in that clearin'," remarked Hashknife. "We'll prob'ly find a trail down here a ways."

"That's right," Sleepy agreed. "Somebody must live down there; I can see a man."

"Where?"

"About halfway between the cabin and the brush, on the right hand side."

"Oh, yeah, I see him now."

The distance was too great for them to identify the person who was now walking toward the cabin. Suddenly he seemed to stumble and fall flat, and a moment later the canyon echoed the sound of a shot.

Another man had appeared. He ran out a short distance and seemed to be looking around. Then he ran ahead and kneeled beside the fallen person.

"I'd shore give my eyeteeth for a pair of field glasses," said Hashknife.

It appeared that the man was running away from the scene of the crime. The two cowboys were about to head for the down trail, when the man came back, leading a horse. He spent some time in loading the horse, but finally led the animal toward the far side of the canyon.

Hashknife and Sleepy hurried along the rim, but fully thirty minutes passed before they were able to find the trail

leading down to the little cabin. It was a deserted place.

They located the spot where the man had dropped; but except for a little blood on the weeds, there was no trace. Then they mounted their horses and struck a trail up the other side. It had taken them so long to reach the cabin that there was little hope of getting another look at the man with the packed horse. They kept a close watch but saw nobody.

Another canyon caused them to swing farther south; and the sun was almost down when they sighted the JT ranch.

"Well, we shore came a long ways south," observed Hashknife. "Anyway, we'll land at a place where they have good suppers."

Mrs. Travis and Leta gave them a hearty welcome. They explained that Brick and his father were in Rimrock City but would be home in a coupe of hours. Hashknife did not mention the shooting in Cherry Canyon.

It was nearly dark when Brick and his father returned. Hashknife and Sleepy met them down at the stable.

"You talk about excitement," said Brick. "Mrs. Santley was shot this afternoon, and the doctor says he ain't sure she'll live."

"Mrs. Santley?" Hashknife queried.

"Yeah. We couldn't git head nor tail to the thing. Al Patton ran the legs off his bronc comin' for the doctor. Al didn't know what happened. He said Mrs. Santley went ridin', and the Saint was in Rimrock. The next he seen of 'em, here was the Saint leadin' a horse, with Mrs. Santley tied to the saddle. He said the Saint jist acted kinda dumb about it. Now, ain't that a funny deal, Hashknife?"

"It shore does sound queer," admitted Hashknife thoughtfully.

He knew now that he and Sleepy had witnessed the shooting. The victim wasn't a man at all, but Mrs. Santley wearing riding clothes. And the man in the cabin must have been the Saint himself.

This new incident was the topic of conversation during supper. Ma Travis wanted to go over to the S-Bar-S and see if there wasn't something she could do; but Jim Travis persuaded her not to.

"I wouldn't go," Hashknife advised. "It would only complicate things."

The Travises tried to get Hashknife and Sleepy to stay all night at the ranch. But Hashknife was anxious to hear more details of the shooting, so he and Sleepy ate supper and went back to town.

THEY found Reckless at the Silver Standard. He insisted on telling them what he knew about the shooting. He had been at the S-Bar-S.

"She's in bad shape," he said. "Doc got the bullet—a .45. The Saint is up in the courthouse talkin' with the prosecutin' attorney and the sheriff. It looks bad for the Saint."

"Why does it look bad for him?" asked Hashknife.

"It's like this, Hashknife: The Saint was in town twice today. The last time in, he had Forrest with him in the private office of this place. They was in there quite awhile. Somebody told the sheriff about it; and after this shootin' Luke wanted to know what the Saint and Forrest talked about. You know how that kinda stuff gits out.

"Well, Forrest admitted that they was together, and after while he told somethin' about a blackmail letter, and what he had advised the Saint to do. It had somethin' to do with a cabin in Cherry Canyon. Anyway, the Saint is talkin' to the prosecutin' attorney about it. Luke told me that it looks bad for the Saint, because it was a deal that the Saint couldn't possibly let his wife know about."

Later in the evening Hashknife met Luke Haley and questioned him about it.

"The Saint is in jail," he said. "It was orders from the prosecutor. Jist

think of the Saint, the biggest man in the county, in jail charged with—I mean, he will be charged with—murder, if his wife dies. The darn fool! If he shot her, why did he bring her home?"

"Why would he shoot her?" asked Hashknife.

"I can't talk to you about that, Hartley. The Saint is my friend."

"What did Forrest have to do with it, Haley?"

"He advised the Saint on a certain matter. Forrest wasn't mixed up in it, except that he knew some things. It's a hell of a mess, any old way you look at it."

"Is his wife still unconscious?"

"I guess she is. She was conscious for a couple of minutes when I was out there. I asked her who shot her, and she said she didn't know. That's all she could tell me."

Hashknife found Forrest, who went up to the room with him. He told Hashknife of his conversation with the Saint, and was able to quote the blackmailing letter almost verbatim. Of course, the Saint had not told Forrest what the incriminating papers contained; but Hashknife had a fairly good idea.

Hashknife wondered if, in some way, Mrs. Santley had found out about the blackmailing letter, followed Santley to the cabin in Cherry Canyon, where he had shot her. That was probably the way the prosecuting attorney had decided.

"You told the prosecuting attorney about the letter?" asked Hashknife.

"Yeah, I told him. He asked Santley if there was any chance that his wife had read the letter, and he said he didn't know. It was sealed, he said; and he didn't know who brought it to the ranch. He found it on a table, but was too worried to ask questions.

"His story of the shootin' wasn't very convincin'. He said he went to the cabin with the dummy package of money and a six gun inside his shirt. He said he went in and stood there quite awhile, lookin' around. He didn't know what move to make next. He said there wasn't any letters there. Then he said he heard a shot and ran to the door. He went outside and looked all around, but didn't see anybody. Then he happened to see somethin' lying on the ground about a hundred feet from the cabin. He went over there and found his wife."

Hashknife nodded thoughtfully. The Saint had told the truth, because that part tallied with what he and Sleepy had seen from the rim of the canyon.

"That might be a good job for you," teased Forrest.

"Anyway," Sleepy said, after Forrest had left, "as far as we know, the Saint shot her, because we never seen anybody else."

"Yeah, that's right, pardner. I'm not defendin' the Saint."

"But right now you're figurin' out how to prove he ain't guilty."

"That wouldn't be defendin' him—merely justice."

THE news of the Saint's arrest flashed quickly around the country, and many came to town to find out the latest news. But the sheriff barred every one from the jail except those whom the Saint wanted to see. Al Patton came in early that morning from the S-Bar-S ranch, bringing the latest news. Mrs. Santley's condition was unchanged. A wire had been sent to a specialist, who was already on his way. Everything possible was being done.

Just before noon that day Hashknife was in the Silver Standard, talking with Jeff Zorn and Sandy Shores, when the sheriff came in and motioned for Hashknife to follow him. The Saint had sent for Hashknife.

They found the Saint in his cell talking with Andy Voss, the marshal. The Saint looked ten years older, shrunken and frightened. The sheriff unlocked the cell door and let Hashknife into the barred square with the two men.

I'll be goin'," said Voss heavily. "See

you later, Saint, I reckon."

"Thank you, Andy."

The cell was locked, and the sheriff went away with Voss. Hashknife sat down on the cot and relaxed his long legs. Neither of them spoke for quite awhile. The Saint broke the silence first, and his voice sounded weary.

"I talked with Forrest this mornin'," he said. "He told me to talk with you, Hartley."

"I dunno what his idea was, but go ahead," drawled the tall cowboy.

"You know what I'm up against if my wife dies. She was conscious long enough to say she didn't know who shot her."

"And you think I can help you, eh?" mused Hashknife aloud.

"Forrest said you might. Luke Haley said it was like a drowin' man graspin' at straws—askin' you to help. But I—I need help."

"You shore do, pardner. All right; put your cards on the table, face up; I want to look at 'em."

The saint got up and walked over to the barred door. The door at the end of the narrow corridor, leading to the sheriff's office, was closed. He came back and sat down.

"I don't know what to tell you," he said. "I'll answer any questions, Hartley."

"All right. Why did you deny the fact that the girl, known as Leta Santley, is your daughter?"

The Saint jerked up quickly.

"You know her, eh?"

"I'm the one that's askin' questions," reminded Hashknife.

"She's not my daughter."

"Don't lie to me, Santley. I want your cards face up."

"All right," agreed the Saint hoarsely. "She's my daughter. I haven't seen her since she was a baby. I've forgotten my first wife. I lied to my present wife. I said I had never been married. She had lots of money and I wanted it; so I kept my mouth shut, when I didn't lie."

"What would happen if your wife should come to know all this?"

"I haven't a thing of my own, Hartley. My wife has more brains than any man in this country. They think I'm the big one—that I'm rich. Hell, I haven't anythin'. She's got everythin' fixed so she can kick me out any old time. She's jealous, suspicious. Oh, hell, what's the use of all this, anyway?"

"And you never was divorced from your first wife, Santley?"

"Unless she got it, we've never been divorced."

"This will all have to come out in the trial," said Hashknife. "It shows that you had a danged good reason for killin' your wife."

"Oh, I know it."

"Santley, did you hire somebody to steal the papers from that girl?"

"No."

"Why was Topaz Allen killed?"

"I don't know."

"Did you know he was back from Phoenix?"

"No, I didn't."

"Don't lie to me, Santley. If I'm goin' to help you, I've got to have the truth. Why did Topaz Allen go to Phoenix?"

The Saint squirmed uneasily. He wanted to lie, but those level gray eyes demanded the truth.

"Topaz Allen worked for me," he said. "He knew how things were for me. He knew about this girl; he knew how I felt toward the JT outfit. Topaz wanted me to put the JT out of business. He told me that for five thousand dollars he'd—well, he'd put that girl and the JT outfit out of the runnin'. He didn't say how he'd do it. I raised the money and he went to Phoenix. I never seen him alive again."

Hashknife nodded thoughtfully.

"Tell me somethin', Santley; if your wife dies and you can prove yourself innocent of her murder, will you get the property?"

"I don't know. I've never seen her will. But she told me one day that if she was killed, and there was any su-

spicion of foul play, I'd never git a cent."

"I don't reckon she loves you very much, Santley."

The big man rested his chin on his hands, staring moodily at the cell floor.

"I think she does," he said slowly. "I—I'd swear she does. But it's jist her way, Hartley. She's a queer woman."

"Do you love her, Santley?"

"In spite of everythin', I do. Honest to God, I do."

Hashknife got up and hitched up his overalls.

"You're a queer pair," he said. "Fear, suspicion, jealousy and love. Well, I reckon it takes all kinds of folks to make a world."

The sheriff was coming back to the cell. He let Hashknife out.

"Zorn and Shores are raisin' hell again," he said. "Drunk, as usual. I don't know where Andy Voss is; mebbe hidin' out."

"Why don't you run 'em in for disturbin' the peace?" asked Hashknife. "A night in jail won't hurt 'em."

The sheriff laughed and turned to the Saint.

"What do you think about it, Saint?" he asked.

"I believe I'd take Hartley's advice, Luke; they might hurt Andy."

"Run 'em in." Hashknife grinned. "I'll see you later, Santley."

HASHKNIFE met Sleepy on the street, and they walked over to the front of the livery stable. The sheriff had gone to the Silver Standard; in a few minutes he and Reckless came out with Zorn and Shores. The ZS owners were drunkenly indignant over their arrest, but the sheriff was firm. It was probably the first arrest ever made in Rimrock City for disturbing the peace.

Hashknife and Sleepy watched the procession until the four men disappeared in the sheriff's office and then they went into the stable to saddle their horses.

"We're goin' out to the ZS ranch," said Hashknife, as they rode away.

"But Zorn and Shores are in jail," said Sleepy.

"That's why we're goin' out there, pardner."

It was all right with Sleepy. Long ago he had learned not to question the things Hashknife did.

They rode on, their horses traveling at a slow dog-trot. The crooked road to the ZS dipped down through an old dry wash, just before it reached the ranch, twisted sharply to the right, and came into the ranch past the old tumble-down stable.

Just as they struck the dry wash a couple of shots, spaced about two seconds apart, rang out. Both men jerked up their horses sharply. There was no sound of whining lead; the shots had not been fired at them. Then came another shot. . . .

Hashknife and Sleepy looked curiously at each other.

"Was this on the list?" asked Sleepy.

"Well, I wasn't figurin' on it," said Hashknife dryly.

He shifted his gun around to a handy position and spurred his horse out of the dry wash. Under ordinary conditions some one at the ranch might be indulging in target practise; but with both Zorn and Shores in jail, it did not seem likely.

They passed the old stable, circled a corner of the corral and looked across the yard. A man was lying face down about twenty steps from the back door, and another was sprawled beside the steps.

Hashknife and Sleepy dropped off their horses and ran forward. The man against the steps was Andy Voss, the marshal of Rimrock, with a bullet through his chest; and they could see at a glance that Andy's moments were few in number. In his right hand he still clutched a heavy Colt gun.

Hashknife stepped over and turned the other man. It was the Mexican who had given Sleepy the decoy note, the same one they had seen at the bar in

Santa Maria. Hashknife told Sleepy who the man was, and Sleepy came over to look at him.

"Voss is dead," Sleepy said.

"So is this feller," added Hashknife. "He got it dead center."

The guns showed that Voss had shot twice, the Mexican once. Hashknife stepped between the two bodies and pointed at the hard dirt.

"Voss fired that second shot into the dirt," said Hashknife. "He probably never knew he pulled the trigger."

"What's the answer?" queried Sleepy.

Hashknife rubbed his long nose thoughtfully and, after a few moments of indecision, he felt through the pockets of both men. Finding nothing of interest, he went into the house, followed by Sleepy.

The ranch-house consisted of three rooms—kitchen, a long front room and one bedroom. It did not take Hashknife long to search the place, but he could not find anything.

Then he went out and poked around the yard, while Sleepy sat down on the steps and rolled a smoke. Out near the corral was a pile of ashes where some débris had been burned. Hashknife sat down and stirred the ashes with a stick, while Sleepy wondered what on earth he expected to find. In fact, the only things he did find were a couple of blackened buckles and the metal form of what had once been the leather covered handle of a suitcase.

Finally he came back and sat down beside Sleepy.

"It looks to me as though Andy wanted to arrest the Mexican, and Mr. Mex put up a battle," Sleepy said.

"Yeah, that might be how she looks, Sleepy; but you got to understand that Andy Voss ran out of authority the minute he left Rimrock City."

"Then what in hell was Voss doin' out here?"

"*Quien sabe?*"

"When it comes right down to askin' personal questions, what in hell are *we* doin' here?" inquired Sleepy.

"Lookin' like a couple idiots," Hashknife replied.

He spuinted at the sun, which was nearly down, shifted his gaze and looked at the two dead men.

"I reckon they'll keep all right," he said. "C'mon."

THEY mounted their horses and headed for the S-Bar-S. Hashknife remembered the spot where they had gone through Cherry Canyon, so there was little delay. On their previous trip to the canyon they had swung too far to the south; so Hashknife led the way due west from the canyon rim, and they soon came in sight of the S-Bar-S.

Things seemed quiet around the ranch as they rode in. Al Patton was saddling a horse at the corral. He waved them a greeting.

"I'm jist headin' for Rimrock City," he told them. "Mrs. Santley is conscious, and she don't know that the Saint is in jail. She knows she's in bad shape, and she's askin' for the Saint. Now, if that ain't hell, what is it?"

"What are you goin' to do about it?" asked Hashknife.

"I dunno. I'm goin' to see if the Saint can't be let out long enough to talk to her. Hell, they ought to let him do that. And I've got to ride down to the JT. Can you imagine it? She wants to see that girl who is stayin, down there.

"And, " chattered Patton, "I've sent Drake and Parker in to meet the train and bring that big doctor out here. Old Doc Townley is up at the house chawin' his nails. I reckon he's done everythin' he knows how, but he's limited. There he is now."

Dr. Townley was coming down toward them. Hashknife went to meet him.

"How's your patient?" he asked.

"Conscious, but pretty bad. Patton, who is Mrs. Santley's lawyer?"

"Arthur Page," replied Patton.

"Send him out, will you? She wants to see him."

"All right, Doc."

"Wait a minute, Doc," said Hashknife, as the doctor turned back. "Where did that bullet hit Mrs. Santley?"

"Under her left shoulderblade, and came out the front."

"Wait a minute! Was she shot in the back?"

"Why, yes."

"Git on that horse, Al; we're halfway to town right now!"

The old doctor scratched his head in bewilderment as the three riders spurred through the gate and went pounding toward Rimrock City. Where the roads forked at the depot they drew rein.

"You let me handle the Saint's end of the deal," said Hashknife. "I'll send the lawyer out to the ranch with him. You rattle your hocks to the JT and get that girl. Tell her I said she must go."

Patton nodded and rode toward the JT. The train would soon be in. Hashknife could see the S-Bar-S team and buckboard at the depot as they rode past. They drew up at the sheriff's office and dismounted. The prosecuting attorney had been talking with the Saint, and was talking with Luke Haley when they came in.

"Mrs. Santley is conscious and wants to see her husband," said Hashknife. "She don't even know he's under arrest, and the doctor don't dare tell her."

"And, as a matter of fact," continued Hashknife, "Santley didn't shoot his wife."

"How do you know that?" snapped the lawyer.

"We saw the woman fall. She was walkin' toward the cabin when the shot was fired. Santley was in the cabin. He couldn't have shot her in the back."

"I'd like to hear more about this," said the lawyer. "You don't suppose I'm going to take your unsupported word for it, do you?"

Bob Forrest came sauntering in and stopped at the doorway in time to hear the lawyer's question.

"I dunno what it's all about," he said, "but I'd take Hartley's word for anythin'."

"Mebbe we better let Hartley tell us what he saw," suggested the sheriff.

Hashknife told them how he and Sleepy happened to be on the rim of the canyon that day, and what they saw.

"And, as a matter of fact, you took too much for granted," said Hashknife. "Mrs. Santley is still alive. Of course, if you want to charge the Saint with assault and intent to kill, that's all right. You can get bail for that charge, I believe. Anyway, his wife is prob'ly dyin', and she wants to see him; and my advice is to turn him loose and let him go home. He ain't goin' to run away."

The lawyer turned to the sheriff.

"What's your opinion, Haley?" he asked.

"Turn him loose. I'll take Hartley's word for what he seen."

"All right; I'll go down to the jail with you."

"You goin' down with us, Hartley?" asked the sheriff.

"We're goin' to find some food." Hashknife grinned. "And would it be too much troube for one of you to find Arthur Page and send him out to the S-Bar-S ranch? Mrs. Santley wants him."

"I'll send him out," replied the prosecutor.

HASHKNIFE saw the sheriff after supper that evening. He said the Saint was unable to understand, but had hurried out to the ranch with Arthur Page.

"How are the pair of peace disturbers?" asked Hashknife.

"Zorn and Shores? Sore as hell. Swear they're goin' to leave this country right away."

"Where's Andy Voss?" Hashknife questioned.

"I dunno," declared the sheriff. "I ain't seen him lately. Andy ain't got much nerve. The Saint got him elected to the job; and now he's figurin' on runnin' for sheriff next election. I don't reckon he'd have much chance."

"No, I don't believe so either," Hash-

knife said seriously. "When are you goin' to turn Zorn and Shores loose?"

"In the mornin'."

"Goin' to take 'em before a justice of the peace?"

"Sure."

"Don't do it. Lemme tell you what I want you to do. Tomorrow mornin' at seven o'clock you are goin' with me and Sleepy. At eight o'clock Reckless will turn Zorn and Shores loose, tell 'em they've served out their fine, and let 'em go free."

"Yeah?" snorted the sheriff. "It seems to me that you're takin' a hell of a lot for granted around here. Comin' in and gettin' us to turn the Saint loose, and then demandin' that we turn Zorn and Shores loose without any trial. Who the hell do you think you are, anyway, Hartley?"

"I can't tell you—yet."

The sheriff gave him a look, and then began to grin sourly.

"I'd be out of Rimrock City when Zorn and Shores get out, if I was you."

"Why?" asked Hashknife quickly.

"Well, there was quite a lot of argument down at the jail when them two was put in, and your name was mentioned."

"Yeah? Do they blame me for puttin' 'em in jail?"

"Mebbe they do. The Saint said it was your suggestion."

"Oh, well, it don't make any difference now. Remember, we ride at seven o'clock, Haley."

"Not until I know damn well what it's all about."

"Suit yourself, pardner. I'd jist as soon have Reckless. Mebbe he'd be a better man in a pinch."

"Why have either of us?"

"When I'm doin' somethin' for the law, I like to have an officer with me," replied Hashknife angrily. "Of course, if you're too damn timid to back up your own badge—"

"I'll be ready at seven o'clock!" snapped the sheriff as he walked rapidly away.

HASHKNIFE and Sleepy went over to the Silk Hat Saloon, where they found LeMoyne and several of his cowboys. The news of the Saint's release had spread, and LeMoyne asked Hashknife what he knew about it.

"I know he's been released," Hashknife told him. "I understand his wife is in pretty bad shape, and she wants him."

The incarceration of Jeff Zorn and Sandy Shores amused LeMoyne.

"Mebbe they'll be good now," he said. "They've raised the devil for a long time around here. I was wonderin' if the Travis family was on their way out to the S-Bar-S; we seen 'em make the turn at the depot as we drove in."

"I heard they was goin' out there. I wonder if the specialist showed up."

"The train ain't in yet; it's been delayed by a washout."

Hashknife and Sleepy left the saloon and walked up the street. It was quite dark now. Andy Voss shared a little office with a justice of the peace. There was a light in the office, and for no apparent reason Hashknife led the way inside.

There was no one in the office, so Hashknife walked boldly over to the marshal's desk, picked up a sheet of writing paper and put it in his pocket. Without any explanation to Sleepy, he led the way out again.

"That's a funny way for you to act," said Sleepy.

"I jist borrowed a sheet of paper which says that Andy Voss is the marshal of Rimrock City."

"What for?" asked Sleepy.

"Jist another of my crazy ideas. Let's go up to the room and talk it over."

"Hashknife, what about them two dead men at the ZS? We've got to do somethin' about them."

"They'll keep."

There was no one in the little lobby of the hotel; so they got their key and went up stairs. As they neared their

room, going down the dark, narrow hallway, Hashknife jerked to a stop. There was a thin line of light coming from under their door.

He stepped over, silently turned the knob and flung the door open just in time to see a man's up flung hands past the flapping curtain as he jumped from the window.

Hashknife raced across the room, then realized that he could not see a man in the dark outside. It was about fifteen feet to the ground, and the two of them heard the thump of a fall.

Hashknife did not hesitate, but whirled and went running down the stairs with Sleepy close behind him.

"Look out, Pardner!" panted Hashknife. "Get the sheriff. I think he's in the Silver Standard. Bring him to the jail on the run."

Sleepy darted across the street, while Hashknife went racing to the jail. Sleepy met the sheriff at the doorway of the saloon, and a few moments later they were running down the street.

They found Hashknife in the jail corridor lighting matches. Zorn and Shores were gone, and in their cell was Reckless, sitting in the middle of the floor, holding his bleeding head in his hands. One big tray and a lot of scattered dishes attested the fact that the prisoners had jumped him when he came in with their supper.

The cell door was half open. The sheriff gaped open mouthed at Reckless.

"He's all right," panted Hashknife. "C'mon, we've got to grab three horses quick. Where was Zorn and Shores's horses?"

"At the hitch-rack."

They ran up the street to the Silk Hat Saloon where the Circle L horses were tied. LeMoyne was in the doorway, talking with one of his men.

"Got to have three horses quick, LeMoyne!" said the sheriff.

LeMoyne flung a hand toward the hitch-rack.

"Take any three, Haley," he said.

"Thank heaven for a man who don't ask questions!" grunted Hashknife.

"Wick, will you go down to the jail? Reckless has been hurt," panted the sheriff.

"Goin' right down," replied LeMoyne.

A moment later the three men were mounted.

"Ride slow," warned Hashknife.

"Them two ZS horses are over at the Silver Standard," Sleepy said.

"I know it; that's why we ride slow."

The sheriff couldn't understand why Zorn and Shores knocked out Reckless and escaped. It seemed ridiculous to him.

"Why, if their horses are at the rack, let's go back and capture them two tough gentlemen," he said.

"This is my party," Hashknife replied. "C'mon, let's hit the grit."

The three riders went pounding down past the depot and out on to the road which led to the ZS ranch.

THE Saint paced up and down the big living room of the S-Bar-S ranch-house—a huge figure, hands clasped behind him, wondering dumbly about everything.

On the wide mantel above the huge fireplace a clock ticked off the minutes. Dr. Townley, haggard from lack of sleep, came from an adjoining bedroom. He looked narrowly at the Saint, but said nothing. The Saint turned on him savagely.

"Well, why in hell don't you say somethin'?" he growled.

"Nothing to say," replied the doctor wearily. He looked at the clock and at his own watch.

Dr. Dunham should be here," he said. "I suppose that train would have to be late tonight."

"Is she talkin' to that lawyer?" asked the Saint.

The doctor nodded.

"Your wife," he said, "has a wonderful constitution, Santley."

A door opened and in came Leta with the Travis family. They grouped just

inside the doorway, and the Saint stared at them blankly. Dr. Townley, not being amazed at their appearance, seated them.

"What in the devil are you folks doin' here?" demanded Santley.

"Your wife sent for the girl," replied the doctor. "You couldn't expect her to come alone, could you?"

"Is it true that my wife sent for you?" the Saint asked Leta.

Leta nodded.

"Who told her about you?" he asked her.

"I haven't any idea; she came down to the ranch to see me."

"She did, eh?"

The Saint turned his head as Arthur Page, the lawyer, came from the bedroom. He was carrying a briefcase and some papers. The doctor immediately went into the bedroom. Page sat down. The Saint started toward the lawyer, when the door opened and two of the S-Bar-S cowboys came in with Dr. Dunham, a tall, lean, gray haired man, who wasted no time in explanations. He flung his coat aside and picked up his bag.

"Which room?" he asked briskly. "I am Dr. Dunham—and lucky to be here. Of all the wild drivers I ever met—" And shaking his head he closed the door behind him.

"How is she?" asked Ma Travis anxiously.

Page shook his head slowly as he informed:

"She was dictating a new will, but wasn't able to finish the job. Perhaps, later."

"A will?" inquired the Saint.

"Yes. She doesn't think you shot her."

"Thank God for that."

"But," continued the lawyer, "that sort of testimony would be ruled out in court."

"That don't interest me a damn bit," growled the Saint. "Hashknife Hartley saw the shootin', and he said I couldn't have shot her."

THE door opened quietly. The Saint had his back turned and did not see Zorn and Shores, bareheaded, each man with a gun in his hand.

"No man can ever accuse me of crooked work," said the Saint.

"They can't, eh?" snarled Zorn, and the Saint whirled around to face the two men. Shores backed closer to the door, watching outside as well as inside.

"What are you two doin' here?" the Saint asked angrily.

"Collectin' what you owe us, damn you!" snarled Zorn.

"I don't owe you anythin'."

"You don't, eh? I suppose you'll swear you paid the money to Topaz Allen—'cause he's dead and can't deny it."

"Money for what?" asked the Saint hoarsely.

"Our commission for stealin' them horses from the JT outfit. You know damn well what it's for. You owe me and Sandy five hundred dollars apiece."

Shores swung his gun quickly, covering Brick, who sprang to his feet.

"So you hired these men to steal our horses, did you, Saint?" he demanded in a rasping voice.

"He hired Topaz Allen to hire us," said Zorn. "We stole seventy-five head, and Topaz beat us out of the commission."

"That's a lie!" roared the Saint. "I never did!"

"Yes, he did, Travis," said Zorn softly. "We don't care if you know it. An hour from now we'll be in Mexico."

"What proof have you?" asked the Saint huskily. "Show me your proofs."

"Proofs! You poor fool, do you think this deal is on paper?"

Arthur Page, the lawyer, got slowly to his feet, eyeing the two guns. From among the papers in his hands he extracted a check.

"I—I think we can settle this deal here," he said nervously. "I didn't want this to come out now, but it—you see, it might save trouble."

He handed the check to Jim Travis, who leaned forward, staring at the slip of yellow paper.

"A check for seventy-five hundred dollars, signed by Mrs. Santley!" gasped Jim Travis.

But before he could ask a question, Dr. Townley stepped into the room. He did not seem to see Zorn and Shores.

"Page, will you come in to finish that business?" he asked. "She wants you."

As Page started for the door, Dr. Dunham stepped out. He whispered to Townley for a moment, and came farther down the room.

"Mrs. Santley has one chance," he announced. "Blood transfusion."

He looked narrowly at Brick Travis for several moments.

"Would you be willing to give blood to save a woman's life?" he asked. "It may do no good. It's merely a chance."

Brick did not hesitate for a moment, but followed the doctor into the room. They were all watching Brick and the doctor, and did not see Zorn and Shores back out, closing the door behind them. No fools, these two hard bitten gunmen. It would be a simple matter for Brick to slip out through a window and come in behind them, or enlist help from some of the S-Bar-S cowboys.

Jim Travis sat there staring at the check, and the Saint slumped down in a chair, holding his head in his hands. Leta got up and walked over to the Saint. He looked up at her, but did not speak.

"I'm sorry," she said. "I guess I brought you bad luck when I came to Rimrock City."

His eyes searched her face for several moments. One of his big hands reached out slowly, and his fingers rubbed along a fold of her dress, as if he wanted to touch her but was afraid.

"No," he said softly. "No, it wasn't you. It was me. If I had been a man, I'd have taken you home to my wife, told her the story—but I was afraid. That's all past, Leta, but it's too late to mend. I've been branded a horse-thief—mebbe worse. You've heard that old, old sayin'. The bigger they are, the harder they fall. Well, I'm fallin' hard. But I can't blame anybody for it, and you less than anybody in the world."

"It might turn out all right," whispered Leta. "Hashknife Hartley says everything will be all right."

Dr. Townley stepped to the doorway.

"Santley, your wife wants you and the girl," he said.

Slowly the big man got to his feet. He hesitated a moment before he put one arm around Leta and they entered the room together.

"I wish I knowed what this check is for," said Jim Travis.

"Don't mind the check now," said Ma. "Money isn't so much."

HASHKNIFE HARTLEY squatted on his heels in the dark, a lighted match in his cupped hands. Leaning over his shoulder was Luke Haley, the sheriff, his eyes wide in the matchlight.

"Andy Voss!" he blurted. "And you—you knew he was dead?"

"We found 'em both today," replied Hashknife. "Do you know the Mexican?"

"Yeah, his name's Ortez. But what's it all about, Hartley? Don't you realize you should have told me about this?"

"I don't realize things thataway," said Hashknife. "Hold this match while I fix this note. It's all written; all I've got to do is put it where—that's fine, right under his hand. Now, the pencil."

Sleepy came striding up in the dark.

"Horses all hidden," he announced.

Hashknife had selected the hiding places that afternoon, and a few minutes later the place was apparently as deserted as it had been before they came. There would soon be a nearly full moon.

Far off in the hills a coyote chorus broke forth. Hashknife, hidden just inside the kitchen door, cupped a match

in his hands long enough to look at his watch and noted that it would be a long time until morning. Sleepy was hidden behind a pile of old lumber near the corral, and the sheriff was inside the stable.

Hashknife had no idea where Zorn and Shores were; he only knew they had been in Rimrock City when he and Sleepy and the sheriff rode out of town.

The moon came up and silvered the world. The coyote chorus arose from another direction now, and a chilly wind swept down across the ranch. Midnight passed, but nothing happened. From the stable door the sheriff could see the two dark blotches on the ground. He imagined he could see the white of Andy Voss's face, propped up as the body was against the steps.

Less than an hour more, and the first tints of dawn painted the eastern sky.

Hashknife's lean face expressed a certain disappointment as he noted the coming dawn. He got stiffly to his feet and moved to the other side of the house, peering through a dusty window. He was about to turn away from the window when he saw a movement out across the dry wash. He leaned closer. A man slid from behind a bush and disappeared into the foliage. Hashknife smiled grimly to himself and went carefully back to the kitchen door.

The stable entrance was on a direct line with the kitchen door. Another thirty minutes of waiting, and he saw Sandy Shores step out from the willows down at the corner of the corral fence and walk out in plain sight. Shores threw up his arm in a signal, and in a few moments Hashknife heard the crunch of gravel as Zorn came past the rear of the house.

He also heard a sharp explanation when Zorn saw the two dead men in the yard. Shores came hurrying to him. Peering through a crack in the door, Hashknife saw them meet at Voss's body. Both men were hatless, and Shores had no coat.

"Ortez and Voss!" exclaimed Sandy. "My Lord, what does this mean?"

"I told you it looked funny when Reckless said nobody knew where Voss was," said Zorn nervously. "Damn him, he came out here to double-cross us, met Ortez and they shot it out. What's that paper under his hand?"

Shores picked up the paper and glanced at it.

"Hartley has got you spotted. Pull out quick and don't stop for— That's all it says, Jeff! He died before he could write any more. See where his hand went bad."

"He's still got the pencil in his fingers," remarked Zorn.

"But we're in time, don'tcha see?" panted Shores. "Nobody knows they're dead. Hell, we can clean up and be in Mexico—"

"And damn fast!" snapped Zorn. "It was lucky I changed the cache yesterday mornin'. C'mon!"

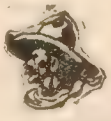
They ran to a corner of their little front porch, tore a board loose, and Zorn reached deep. Hashknife could see their backs, and he knew what they sought. They came running back, stopped near Voss's body, looking toward the old lumber pile where Sleepy was hidden.

"Look out!" snapped Zorn. "It's a trap, Sandy!"

For some reason Sleepy jerked into view, falling backward, and as quick as a flash Zorn drew a sixshooter and fired. The sheriff sprang from the stable entrance, swinging a gun in his hand. Shores fired at him, and the sheriff's return shot bored a hole in the door just above Hashknife's head.

"Back to the horses!" snapped Zorn.

But as he whirled to run he saw Hashknife in the dooorway.



THEIR guns sounded as one, but Zorn's gun was swinging too widely. His shot missed Hashknife by inches. Zorn stumbled sidewise, his right arm broken. With a jerk of his arm, which must have caused untold agony, he flipped

the gun and caught it with his left hand, but before he could cock it the next bullet crashed into him. He went down in a heap. Shores paid no attention to Zorn or Hashknife. He was running to the right, intending to circle the house and get back to his horse. The sheriff's bullets were nicking the ground around Shores's feet, and Shores was throwing wild lead at the sheriff, when Sleepy's gun whanged into the chorus, and Shores went into a spinning fall.

Shores's empty gun went spinning away, and he threw up both hands in token of complete surrender. Hashknife stepped over and reached into Zorn's pocket. He drew out a buckskin bag which he opened while the sheriff ran up and handcuffed Sandy Shores.

"Hell, you must think I'm goin' to run away!" panted Shores.

"Goin' to be damn sure you don't."

"Is Zorn dead?" asked Sleepy, panting a little.

"Broken arm and a busted shoulder," replied Hashknife. "What the devil happened to you down there? Gosh, you almost ruined things."

"Did I?" Sleepy chuckled. "Well, dang you, you'd have done the same if a five-foot diamond-back rattler tried to crawl under you."

"Was that it?" exploded Hashknife.

"It shore was. Scared me out of a year's growth. I reckon he was hived up under that pile of lumber with me layin almost on him all night."

"What you got in that sack, Hartley?" asked the sheriff anxiously.

"Diamonds."

"Diamonds?"

"The ones our friends here stole from the mail car."

The sheriff's jaw sagged. Hashknife turned to Shores.

"How many of these did Topaz Allen buy off you to plant on Brick Travis?"

"So you knew that, did you?" queried Shores painfully.

"Yeah, I knew it. And you shot Topaz Allen."

"Jeff shot Topaz; I wasn't out there. Topaz was a dirty double-crosser. He never played square with us. He hired us to steal JT horses, but all we got was half the price we sold 'em for. Topaz said the Saint was to pay us for stealin' 'em, and he owes us each five hundred dollars yet."

"So Zorn shot Topaz, eh?" mused Hashknife. "Topaz got the diamonds to plant on the Travis family. That's all clear. Topaz was supposed to go to Phoenix, but he only went to Saguaro, and came back here."

"How did you know that?" asked Shores.

"He carried a suitcase from Rimrock, and I found where one had been burned out there in the yard."

"I'll be damned! Jeff was scared to keep it around here, 'cause it had Topaz's name on it; so we burned it with all his clothes."

"And Voss bein' sore at you two was only a bluff."

"Shore. Andy and Topaz was old friends, and Topaz used his pull to get Andy made marshal. Andy was as crooked as a snake. I could tell you a lot more, but I'm no squealer."

"All right," agreed Hashknife. "As I understand it, Topaz came here to get diamonds enough to plant over at the JT; but he gave you a stall and didn't pay for the stones."

"He had the money," Shores said. "Jeff accidentally heard the Saint and Topaz plan it out. Topaz was goin' to keep the money."

"And," said Hashknife, "Jeff followed Topaz to the JT. After he killed Topaz, he took some money and papers off him, but he seen Brick comin' and had to pull out without the stones."

"Was you there, Hartley?"

"No." He laughed wryly. "I merely threw a diamond hitch, as you might say. Which one of you shot Mrs. Santley?"

"Jeff. You know damn well I was here all the time!"

"I know it. But why did he shoot her?"

"Jeff thought she was a man. Jeff told the Saint in that note to come alone. I told Jeff he'd never be able to hook the Saint for that money, but he was goin' to try. Jeff thought the Saint had brought help, and he downed the woman. That was bad. But you had us up in the air when you planted Topaz's body up by the tracks and made it look like a gun fight. We knew you had a hand in it, and that was why we searched your room last night, lookin' for them diamonds. We couldn't find you in town; so we went out to the S-Bar-S, thinkin' you was there."

"Why did you knock Reckless Blair out last night?"

"Scared. Jim Teele, from the Circle L, came in to see us. Him and Reckless was together, and Teele talked about you fellers. He said you was the smartest detective on earth, and you was probably here to clean up Rimrock. He said you was a mind reader and all that. And when Reckless said they couldn't find Andy Voss in town, we got scared that everythin' wasn't workin' out right."

"This Ortez person was handlin' horses for the Mexican rebel movement, wasn't he?" asked Hashknife.

Shores grinned painfully.

"It's a damn good thing we didn't get you two fellers down there the other night. We was shore wild about it. But we didn't think you seen me and Zorn."

"Do you realize what you're tellin'?" asked the sheriff. "We could hang you both on jist what you've already told."

"Well, don't I git anythin' for tellin'?" asked Shores.

"We'll see what we can do for you, if you tell everythin'," replied Hashknife.

"Well, what more do you want to know?" Shores groaned.

"Which one of you killed Harry Neil?"

"Topaz killed Neil. The poor fool went to Santa Maria with Topaz, and stumbled on to information about stolen horses. He told what he knew to Topaz, and Topaz was the man who was runnin' the show. We sold seventy-five head, and we'd have sold twenty more if you two had kept your damn beaks out of the pot. And I'd jist like to remind you that I'm wounded, and it's damn hot out here."

The sheriff nodded and turned to Hashknife.

"Where in the devil did you find out all this stuff, Hartley?"

"Oh, jist lookin' around here and there. I reckon we better pack these jiggers over to the S-Bar-S, 'cause that's where the doctor is right now."

THE sheriff and Sleepy went over to Zorn, who was beginning to show signs of life. Shores licked his dry lips and looked up at Hashknife.

"Hartley," he said softly, "are you goin' to see that I git an even break? You know what I mean. I've talked about it, open-like; and I never murdered anybody by myself."

"I'll git you a break, Shores."

"All right. Go in the house. In the bedroom, look under the northeast corner of that old carpet. You'll find an envelop. Topaz wrote some stuff, and he said the Saint would pay a lot of money to git it. We won't need his money now."

Hashknife found the envelop which he opened, drawing out a single sheet of paper. It was written in ink and read:

To whom it may concern:

This is a true statement of fact, and can easily be sustantiated. Mrs. S. P. Santley, formerly Mrs. Jack Daley, was a female gambler and head of a smuggling organization at Juarez. When the gang broke up Mrs. Daley, also known as Diamond Laura shot and killed Jack Daley, her husband, escaped from Mexico and took the name of Laura Monteith, masquerading as an unmarried woman from New Orleans looking for Western investments. She married S. P. Santley. The murder of Jack Daley has never been solved by the law.

It is also a fact that Mrs. S. P. Santley negotiated with a certain party to ruin the JT cattle outfit. This certain party was to

steal horses bearing the JT brand and dispose of them to their own profit; and in addition to this, Mrs. Santley was to pay to this certain party the sum of one hundred dollars for every horse stolen or killed.

This statement attested by

—Topaz Allen
—Andy Voss

Hashknife pocketed the letter and walked out. Sleepy had brought one of the horses and was preparing to load Zorn on to the saddle. Hashknife went over to Shores.

"When did you last see that letter?" he asked.

"Wasn't it there?" Shores asked weakly.

"Nope."

"Topaz must have taken it away with him."

"Do you know what was in it, Shores?"

"Nope. Topaz said we'd shore git plenty money from the Saint for it, that's all I know."

"Who hired you to steal them JT horses?"

"Topaz Allen. He said—"

Hashknife looked down at Shores. His gray eyes were hard as tempered steel, and the outlaw hesitated.

"Topaz never played square with you, Shores," said Hashknife. "He was a liar and a crook. Who hired you to steal them JT horses?"

Shores looked queerly at Hashknife, licked his lips for a moment and looked away.

"Topaz Allen hired us," he said. That's all I know, Hartley."

"Jist remember that, and if Zorn says anythin', you say he lies."

"All right; I'd rather have you for me than agin me, Hartley."

OVER at the S-Bar-S a big group of people sat on the porch. All of the ranch crew were there; the prosecuting attorney; Reckless, with his head in bandages, Bob Forrest, who had come out with Reckless and the prosecutor. Brick, pale and wan from loss of blood, was sitting in an old rocker. Leta sat beside Ma Travis, their tired eyes looking out at the bright sunlight. There was no conversation; every one seemed to be waiting.

The Saint came to the doorway, looking out over the heads of those on the wide porch. His eyes sought out Brick Travis, and he came over to him.

"Thank you, Brick," he said huskily. "It shore was white of you to give her that blood. But it—it wasn't no use."

Brick looked up quickly.

"You mean—" he faltered.

The Saint nodded, his lips compressed tightly, and patted Brick on the shoulder. No one spoke. Finally the Saint lifted his head and looked around.

"Thank you all for comin' out here," he said. "Last night I was branded a horsethief by Zorn and Shores. Believe it if you want to. I reckon my wife believed it. She gave Jim Travis a check for seventy-five hundred dollars. It don't matter; I'm not crawlin'."

Leta walked over and took him by the arm.

"I don't believe it," she said. "Everything will be all right."

"What's this comin'?" asked one of the cowboys who had sighted the cavalcade approaching across the hills.

They watched the riders enter the yard, with Hashknife in the lead; Zorn had slumped in the saddle, roped on, with Sleepy leading the horse. Shores was riding upright, but the sheriff was leading his mount. They came up close to the porch, and Shores looked defiantly at the crowd.

"There's the prosecutin' attorney, Hartley," said Shores. "You can tell him I turned State's evidence."

"You can put it in writin' when you git to town," said Hashknife.

"We cleaned up the whole thing," announced the sheriff proudly. "Andy Voss and Ortez was two of the gang, and they killed each other. Topaz was one of the gang, and Zorn killed him. It was Shores and Zorn who robbed the

mail, and we got all the diamonds. It was Zorn who shot Mrs. Santley. They stole JT horses and sold—"

"Mrs. Santley passed away a few minutes ago," interrupted the prosecutor.

Hashknife reached up slowly and removed his hat.

"Gee, that's tough luck," he said. "Saint, I'm shore sorry."

The Saint came down the steps and walked up to Hashknife.

"Can you prove that Zorn shot my wife?" he asked huskily.

"Absolutely," replied Hashknife. "Shores confessed that Zorn shot her."

The Saint drew a deep breath and turned to Shores.

"Who hired you to steal them JT horses, Shores?" he asked.

Shores grimaced with pain from his broken leg. His eyes flashed to Hashknife, then jerked back to the Saint.

"Topaz Allen," he said.

"Why did you accuse me last night?"

"Oh, that. Hell, we came over here to try to find Hashknife Hartley; and we thought we'd force you to give us some money. It—it didn't work."

The Saint turned toward the crowd. Leta came down to him.

"That clears you of everything," she said.

He patted her shoulder.

"It helps," he said. "I'm a fool and a knave; but thanks to Hashknife Hartley I'm neither a horsethief nor a murderer."

"When do I get a doctor?" asked Shores.

Arthur Page, the lawyer, came out on the porch carrying some papers.

"Folks," he said, "this may not be the proper place or the proper time to make a statement of this kind; but Mrs. Santley would wish it, I believe. She wrote three wills. The first one was written several years ago, the second one last night; and the third one was written and duly signed, witnessed by both doctors, shortly before she passed away.

"Both doctors will testify that her mind was exceedingly clear. In a concise way she gives one half of the estate to her husband, S. P. Santley. To Leta Santley, daughter of S. P. Santley, she gives the other half of the estate, with the provision that Leta Santley does not marry."

All eyes turned to Leta, who was staring at the lawyer. Not conscious of the crowd, her eyes shifted to Brick Travis, who took a deep breath and tried to smile at her.

"As you possibly do not know" continued the lawyer, "every bit of the estate was in Mrs. Santley's name; so one half of it will mean a fortune. It was Mrs. Santley's wish that Leta Santley abide by this provision. But if she does not abide by it, she will lose every cent of this estate."

The lawyer drew a deep breath and shuffled the papers.

"And," he continued, "in the event that she should consider a marriage of more account to her than one half of this big estate, her inheritance will go to Brick Travis, in consideration of what he did for Mrs. Santley last night."

It was several moments before any one understood.

"A remarkable woman," said the lawyer seriously. "And a woman with a rare sense of humor."

"When do I git a doctor?" Shores asked. "I never did like to listen to a lecture when I've got a busted leg."

THE two doctors came out and, during the confusion of assisting the wounded, Hashknife drew the sheriff and prosecutor aside. He gave them the diamonds and told them of his promise to Shores.

"We'll take care of him, Hartley," assured the prosecutor.

Taking further advantage of things, Hashknife and Sleepy managed to get their horses around a corner. They headed away from the ranch. Out on the main road, they spurred toward

Rimrock City. It was like them to steal silently away, avoiding thanks or possible reward.

"We'll return these Circle L horses, saddle our own and be out of town before anybody gits in from the ranch," Hashknife said. "I'll send Jim a wire and tell him we got the man who killed Neil. That's all we came for. The rest was a by-product, anyway."

"Gee, that rattler almost fanged me this mornin'." Sleepy laughed. "He shore took my mind off bullets."

"Didja kill him?"

"Nope. He was honest enough to buzz. Say, do you remember when we was ridin' down toward Rimrock, the day we got here? Away off to the right was a long range of dim hills, kinda like smoke away out there."

Hashknife smiled slowly.

"I've been thinkin' of 'em all mornin', Sleepy."

Hashknife drew out the letter he had taken from under the carpet at the ZS and tore it into little bits, scattering them in the road.

"Idols of clay," he said, as the last piece fluttered away.

Sleepy nodded, but without understanding.

"Well, we found out what was on this side of the hill," he said.

"Jist a mixture of human bein's," agreed Hashknife.

They grinned sleepily at each other and went jogging along to Rimrock. Their job was finished, they wanted no thanks. Just another long, dusty road ahead—and hills to cross.

Cape Horn Challenge

By Harry Kemp

FROM a thousand miles of mainland, lifting brows immense and sheer,
I stand ready for the battle every day of all the year.
I will send your yardarms rolling up and down my deadly seas,
Set your beams and stanchions creaking, and your carlings, and your knees.
While your bark goes on her beam-ends, I'll wash out your galley fire:
Sea-chests, dishes dashed to leeward, 'mid a ship-crew's oathful ire!
That's my Cape Horn *calm:* my "weather" comes more certain and accursed—
Gale on roaring gale contending which can maul your craft the worst;
For a brave ship is a challenge that I never meet in vain,
With my rain that turns to sleet, and sleet that seldom turns to rain—
Sleet that stings like flying needles; hail, a horizontal line,
Where it strikes the skin it flays it like a rope-end soaked in brine.
Ice will gather on the catheads and on decks no axe can free,
And you'll seem to ride a ghost-ship up a purgatorial sea;
Down a black abyss of midnight, through an even ghastlier day,
You will fight with sheet-iron topsails standing stiff with frozen spray!

But, oh, where are my bullies who returned me blow for blow?
And, oh, where are those clipper ships whose grace I used to know?
And is it true, this rumour, that, with palms on either hand,
Men drift along a lazy ditch they've cut across the land?
Alas, if so, for courage and for strength and wit allied,
And the mighty seal of manhood won from Cape-Horn gales defied!
Oh, they tell dread tales about me, but there's honour in the Horn,
If you're man to brave my dangers, if you'll overcome my scorn—
The driving sleet, the winds that beat, the icebergs threatening far—
Oh, I'll lend your spirit friendship if your guidance is a star:
For you may have been a farmer and you may have been a tailor,
But you've got to weather round the Horn before you are a sailor!

By the author of the Pulitzer Prize Novel, "The Store"

T. S. STRIBLING

JUDGE LYNCH

THE EDGED human excitement which swept through the town of Eufala underwent an animal transformation in the kennels of Judge John B. Gilroy and reached the old lawyer's ears in the sudden barking and snarling of his fox hounds.

In his house on the hill, the Judge took his nose out of an old leather bound volume of the State Reports and inquired querulously of Thurston Gilroy, his son and junior partner, what was bothering his dogs.

The younger man surmised absently that it might be a dog fight.

The Judge thought, sardonically, to himself that this second sapless son of his didn't know the difference between a dog fight and a dog theft. He positively couldn't tell by the timbre, by the burr in the throats of the brutes whether they were frightened or furious.

The old jurist quirked down his broad-lined mouth, levered himself out of his easy chair and walked out on the broad front porch of the manor. His law office was in his home, or at least, it was in the rambling structure which had been his home before his second and last wife died. After that, of course, it became just the house where he lived.

On the open porch, sure enough, he could hear somebody scolding in a low tone trying to quiet the dogs. These subdued sounds outraged the old man. He turned and called in an undertone through the green jalousie of the French window—

"Thurston, some daggone boy is trying to steal out my houn's again and ruin 'em after rabbits and squirrels!"

The son answered absently out of a case book—

"Well . . . you never hunt anyway, father."

Such lack of perception, such philistinism as this remark conveyed galled the Judge. The idea of a man allowing a fine pack of fox hounds to be ruined because he didn't use them often! Now

his other son, Jim, by his first wife, would have been just as wrought up about the dogs as he was himself. Jim was a man. There was something warm, human, enveloping about him. It was a pity that Jim didn't have a little of Thurston's studiousness, perseverance and sobriety about him, a little . . . just a little.

During these musings, the old man had been striding down the path from the manor to the kennels and now he saw something that caused him to break off his thoughts abruptly and ejaculate:

"Why . . . why . . . I be switched . . . Sam Lannam!"

A smallish man stood in the middle of the kennel yard trying to snap leashes into the rings of the hounds' collars. It was not only surprising, it was sharply embarrassing. The little man was a cousin of the Judge's first wife, Sarah Lannam. To come upon his cousin like this made the Judge feel very awkward indeed. More than that—Sam was a perfectly staid little man and to see him trying to sneak fox hounds out of their kennel was so out of character that it bordered on the unbelievable.

Mr. Lannam must have sensed the Judge's gaze, for he glanced up, then suddenly straightened and stammered in confusion,

"I . . . I . . . why Jedge . . . I come over to see if I could . . . er . . . borry yore houn's for a while . . . I . . . I mean one or . . . or two of 'em?"

At this the old jurist shifted to indignation.

"Sam Lannam, if anybody had told me a cousin o' mine would have tried to steal out my houn's for a rabbit hunt . . ."

Sam began protesting earnestly, shocked at the charge:

"Why Jedge, Jedge, don't think that o' me! Why I wouldn't run a rabbit with the youngest pup in yore pack!"

"Hell, squirrels, then," charged the old man.

"Naw, nor squirls neither, Jedge!"

The old lawyer grew more out of patience and challenged—

"Look here, don't stand there an' tell me you're fixin' to chase foxes this time o' day!"

"Why-y . . . no . . . no. . . it wasn't foxes, Jedge," admitted Sam reluctantly.

"Then what in the devil are you after? You ain't taking them out for exercise?"

Sam began stammering,

"N-n-nunno . . . now wait now . . . I tell you Jedge . . . I tell you. Me and the boys knowed damn well if you knowed what we was after you wouldn't let us have yore dawgs . . ."

"So you tried to slip 'em out?"

"Yes, daggone it, I was. The boys debbitized me to go because I was kinder kin to ye, an' they figgered if you caught me, you wouldn't do much, an' . . . that's the whole thing."

A flicker of amusement lightened the Judge's wrath at this naivete,

"Well," he agreed, "I don't suppose I will do much to you, but those who egged you on are accomplices, Sam, I may 'tend to them . . . who are they?"

The little man lifted a hopeless hand—

"Oh Jedge, you can't possibly 'tend to them!"

"Why can't I?"

"Why, it's ever'body . . . the whole danged town sent me!"

"What! What the devil are you talking about? What does the town want with my houn's?"

"Well . . . if you mus' know . . . Rabbus . . . Blue Pill Rabbus, that nigger bootlegger . . ."

"Yes?"

"Well . . . we want to ketch Blue Pill, that's all . . . he took to the swamp."

The old man stared at this weird explanation—

"Good Lord, I hope the whole town ain't that thirsty!"

Lannam was shocked:

"Thirsty? Naw, they're mad . . . with whisky legal an' ever'thing and Blue Pill still bootleggin' . . . they're all riled up about it!"

The old lawyer put his hands in his pockets as he always used to do when

cross questioning a witness—

"Sam, you're not only tryin' to steal out my dawgs, you're lyin' to me."

"Why I'm not lyin' to you?"

"You certainly are. If everybody was against Blue Pill's bootleggin' there wouldn't be anybody for him to bootleg to. And if a lot of you are against it, why don't you let the constable or the sheriff attend to Rabbus, what's the use in the whole town . . ."

Here Lannam broke out angrily,

"By gannies, Constable Jack Henderson did start to attend to him, Jedge, an' he's shot!"

"Who . . . the nigger's shot?"

"Naw, Constable Jack. Blue Pill shot him and took to the swamp!"

"Rabbus shot him when Henderson was trying to arrest him for bootleggin'?"

"Yeh! Yeh, that's right! The damn black skunk . . . and after whisky had got legal too! An' him keep on bootleggin' . . . an' shoot a debbity because he was tryin' to enforce a perfectly reasonable law! Hell, before liquor was legal they would a been some sense to it . . . but durin' them days, Constable Jack never bothered nobody for bootleggin'. You can say that much for Jack Henderson. He was a good man. He laid off the bootleggers durin' prohibition. He tried to work for the best intrusts of the people. Now, when liquor's back, he got shot down for tryin' to enforce a perfectly jest an' reasonable law! It's the damndest outrage that has been pulled off in this county for years!"

The old lawyer stood staring at this account.

"Why in the hell didn't you tell me that at first, Sam Lannam!"

"Why, we knowed . . . you bein' a lawyer . . . we knowed dang well you wouldn't lend yore dawgs to chase down a nigger and do to him what we're fixin' to do!"

The Judge looked at Sam intently.

"You mean . . ."

"Shore that's what I mean! They're a hundred men in the swamp now, but they got no houn's, an' they ain't got a chancet in the worl' to jump that buck nigger in all them deer covers!"

THE OLD justice drew himself up—

"And you fellows were afraid I wouldn't lend you my houn's?"

"Why shore . . . you bein' a lawyer!"

"I gad, Sam," quavered the old man, "I think I know the workings of the law as well as you boys do . . . or better. I've had enough experience with it. I know how a case like that hangs fire and is put off and appealed and reversed and *nolle prossed* . . . I know damn well. How many dogs do you-all want?"

"Can we get some?"

"How many do you want, I say?" repeated the Judge in an angry tone.

"Why . . . Why . . . all we can git!"

"Then slip a leash on old Belle there and lead her off. The rest'll follow. You take her along, fast as you can go. I'll step to the house for a gun . . . be there myself. I gad . . ." the old man's voice trembled, "shooting down a law enforcement officer after prohibition is dead and gone . . . damn nigger deserves to be hung as high as Haman!"

With profuse thanks, Mr. Lannam leashed the dog. Judge Gilroy turned and hurried back up the path to the manor. As he did so there flickered across his mind an uncomfortable presage of Thurston, his second son.

The Judge knew that when Thurston found this out he would be amazed. He would not only be amazed, he would launch at once into the opposition. Thurston was like that, the most butt-headed, argumentative fellow! His second son took after his mother, Mary Thurston, who was the daughter of Judge Harvey L. Thurston of the Supreme Court. Lawyer Gilroy had thought, when Mary gave birth to a son that the boy ought to make a fine lawyer. Well, he had, but that was absolutely all you could say for him.

Now the Judge wondered if he could slip out a gun and not let Thurston hear him . . . and get with Jim . . . I gad, if he could only get with Jim . . .

Here the old man entered the manor and involuntarily hushed his steps as he passed the door of the law offices in which Thurston sat reading.

When the old jurist realized he was tiptoeing he was annoyed with himself. He brooded in a kind of vague rebellion that he didn't care what Thurston thought . . , that he had known right from wrong long before Thurston had ever been born . . . he still knew it and he didn't give a damn what Thurston thought . . . but he kept on tiptoeing.

When he got through the hall, onto the back porch and into the junk room, he felt a wave of relief.

A jumble of guns, fishing tackle, bridles, saddles lay before the old man. He picked up some leggings, fixed them hurriedly around his thin shanks, then looked over the shot guns and rifles. An illogical flicker of sportsmanship caused him to choose a heavy repeating rifle. He would fire single bullets. He would give the nigger the same chance of life that he would have given to a running buck.

On a shelf he found cartridges. As he fed these shakily into the magazine, he glanced now and then at the door. He finished loading, picked up the gun and started across the back porch to cut across the back yard to the side gate. Just as he stepped down to the grass, he heard a step in the hallway. The old man's heart gave a little squeeze. He stopped where he was on the grass beside the porch floor and stood looking defiantly at his son who had just stepped out of the door.

The younger man stared at the hastily gotten up figure in leggings and hunting coat:

"Why father . . . you . . . you're not going hunting are you . . . I thought you were working up that Middleton Coal case?"

"Thurston, I . . . " he was sharply tempted to let the matter go as a simple hunting venture . . . "I'm going into the Middleton case the moment I get back . . ."

The younger man was dumbfounded.

"But . . . what's come over you . . . leaving a pressing brief to . . . go on a hunt . . . a rabbit hunt . . . what?"

The ex-circuit Judge hesitated, moistened his dry old lips, then he said in a monotone,

"Blue Pill Rabbus, that bootleggin' nigger, has killed Constable Jack Henderson."

The younger man stared at this. Presently he asked—

"When did it happen?"

"Why . . . a few minutes ago, I suppose. That was what that racket down at the kennels was about. Sam Lennam had come for my dogs."

"Where is Blue Pill?"

"In the swamp."

"Who all are after him?"

"Sam said the whole town was after him."

Thurston became uneasy at once:

"Look here, if . . . if it's a mob . . . they're not going to just catch that nigger, father . . . they're going to hang him . . . you won't be able to stop it!"

A strong impulse went through the old lawyer to say that he would do what he could, that it was his duty as a citizen; but the easy lie which would have supported him temporarily was a distaste in his mouth. He drew a breath:

"I know what they're going to do, Thurston . . . I'm not trying to stop it." And he started walking toward a side gate that led into an alleyway.

The second son leaped from the porch and followed—

"Father," he cried in amazement, "you can't mean . . ."

"Yes I do . . . I mean exactly that," said the older man harshly.

"But you can't . . . why, my God . . . a lawyer . . . a man who has been a Judge . . ."

"Yes, me . . . especially me . . . I have been a Judge . . . who, better

than I, knows the shilly shallying of the courts! A nigger has a child's mind, Thurston, a trial . . . the penitentiary . . . even a hanging . . . anything far away is dreamy, unreal to them. But a rope and bullets . . . right at them. They see that. It stops 'em!"

The younger man was thunderstruck—

"Why such . . . such anarchy . . . out of you!"

"It's not anarchy, it's law . . . immediate law."

The two walked on across the back yard together arguing:

"But the effect on the people themselves . . . a town full of executioners . . . a community of hangmen . . . it's brutalizing . . . wait, for God's sake, don't walk on! Let's stop and talk this over!"

The old man made a gesture:

"There's nothing to say! The nigger killed a white officer trying to enforce a reasonable law . . . it wasn't a prohibition law, it was . . . a . . . a sensible license . . . and then shoot a man down!"

THE OLD lawyer vibrated with anger.

"But let the court set his punishment!"

Judge Gilroy shook his heavy rifle:

"Court hell . . . his lawyer will want to play smart . . . make a name . . . he can always appeal on the score of a prejudiced jury. And the supreme court will have to reverse it, because, of course, the jury's prejudiced . . . the worse the crime, the surer the prejudice and the oftener the damn skunks of criminals get loose on that technicality. Son, it's better to lynch 'em before a trial than afterwards. It looks more law abiding!"

The younger man walked on at his wits end—

"Father . . . why are you going out of this back gate?"

"I don't want Main street to see me with . . . this. Not today."

"I see you don't. Isn't that something? A man, who has been a circuit judge ashamed to walk out his front gate!"

"Thurston, I draw down my curtains when I undress, but there is nothing shameful about going to bed."

The young man gave up his indirect attack—

"Listen . . . don't go . . . I'll join you in getting up a petition to revise our State criminal code so the law will be precise . . . absolute . . . father, I'll give my time to it! I'll push such a reform!"

The older man shook his rifle again—

"This is a petition! Every mob that ever formed in America is a petition against damned, lax, technical, unreliable and corrupt criminal court practice. If courts of justice won't heed these petitions they'll never heed anything you'll ever write!"

The son followed to the side gate and stopped—

"It's a horrible thing to . . . to murder a man without letting him say a word or make a plea . . . you don't know why Blue Pill shot the constable, there may have been some reason . . . some extenuating circumstance . . ."

The old lawyer turned about sharply,

"Suppose it had been Jim who was killed! How would you feel about reason and extenuating circumstances then! Don't you know you would . . ."

The son made a sharp erasing gesture,

"That's the very point. I would be wild, vengeful, unjust . . . so will that whole crowd down yonder . . . but a jury is calm . . . they hear both sides . . . calmly . . ."

The old man was bayed. He turned with exasperated evenness of voice,

"Listen . . . that's theory . . . theory . . . but it doesn't work. Of course it's unjust. But it's still more unjust to the people when every criminal goes free the moment he comes into a court. If somebody must suffer an injustice let it be the criminal, not the people at large who have remained obedient to the law until there is no

longer any kind of law to obey!"

With this denunciation the old man passed through the side gate into an alley that avoided the heart of town and led into a sassafras grown field. This, in turn, sloped down to the gloomy fastness of a cypress swamp into which Blue Pill Rabbus had escaped.

An odd feeling went over the Judge as he entered the twilight of the swamp to help lynch a negro. He was hardly beyond the edge when he heard the distant bell-like baying of his hounds. It came to his ears with the mouth of his slut picked out like a sinister cadenza in music. Now he dropped his rifle in the hook of his elbow, ready for a fast shot, as he had done deer hunting years before, and moved forward among the huge buttressed trunks and upthrust knees of the cypresses.

As he hurried toward the faint echoing ululation, a sudden suspicion slowed him down. From his knowledge of negroes in general and of Blue Pill Rabbus in particular, the old lawyer divined that it was not impossible that he should meet the bootlegger wading on a back track trying to steal out of the swamp, while his pursuers beat through the deer coverts.

Then he knew too, that Rabbus would be armed for he had killed Henderson. In addition to this, Judge Gilroy realized that he was walking into the swamp with the light to his back, while the negro coming out would be a black object against darkness. It was very likely that Blue Pill would see him before he would see Blue Pill, and a tang of possible danger entered the old jurist's man-hunt.

So he moved very slowly and silently. He screwed up his old eyes against the gloom and tried to see as keenly as he had seen in his deer-hunting days. He wished, almost with the flesh of his body, that his first son, Jim, were with him. Jim had eyes. Jim had his own early deer hunting eyes and something more. And his first son was the fastest shot in Eufala. He could give Blue Pill a tenth of a second and still shoot first. He sure wished he had Jim with him.

The old Judge got to thinking of his two boys; how his first son was everything that his second son was not. It was as if the two sides of himself had been cleanly divided between his two sons; Thurston, his legal, cool, dispassionate side, and Jim his roistering, hard drinking, fox hunting side, which, of course, he, himself, had put by years ago, but which he remembered.

OF A SUDDEN, the half nostalgia which had been induced by the distant baying of the hounds was broken into by an irregular roll as if some tyro were hammering a kettle drum in the echoing woods.

At the gun fire the old man started, gave up his stalking and began wading hastily through the dark red swamp water toward the direction of the noise. Then, on another thought, he knew if the mob actually had found Rabbus, the negro was dead. It was foolish to hurry. So he slowed down again, and moved ahead, straining his eyes through the aisles of the cypresses and the dull gleam of the watery floor. Then, in the midst of this, by a chance glimpse from the tail of his eye, he saw a ripple, a scroll of little waves, expand from behind the column of a tree.

The old judge dropped instantly behind the outswung flange of a trunk and stood motionless, rifle ready, watching intently the slight movement of the water.

The little waves quieted to a mirror. For a minute, for two minutes, nothing whatever happened. In the distance the firing rattled again and subsided. The judge thought about this with intensity. He decided the waves he had seen must have come from a muskrat, or a raccoon fishing for minnows. He was on the breath of moving on again when the ripples were repeated. Then he saw they were progressing silently somewhat athwart his general direction.

The old lawyer stopped breathing to trace the source of the disturbance. After ten seconds he made out a dark object moving among the cypress knees. The old man's tension eased a trifle; he thought the thing was a large hog; then he suspected a small swamp bear; a moment later, from the manner in which it paused and looked about, he knew it was a negro.

For a moment bewilderment held the old lawyer when he realized that somehow Blue Pill had slipped away and left the mob still firing. Then he recalled that excited men will fire at any movement in a covert, and keep on firing. Then the added puzzle came to him; how had Blue Pill slipped away from the hounds. He wondered suddenly if some fool posse-man had shot one of his dogs and the others had run away!

As these things flickered through his head, he felt for the hammer of his rifle, cocked it. He levelled it in silence, then suddenly shouted in a high cracked voice,

"Halt there, Blue Pill! Han's up!"

As the dim figure whirled to run, he fired.

While the shot echoed amid the twilight swamp, the old man stood behind the flange of a cypress watching the threshing, struggling thing in the water. Presently he waded out with the greatest circumspection, rifle ready, and stood beside the body. He poked it with his rifle barrel with a sudden breath of horror lest it be some other negro who had hidden in the swamp under the general threat of the mob.

"Blue Pill! Rabbus! Rabbus! Is that you Rabbus?" he asked in a taut voice.

The man groaned. The Judge reached down and turned his face toward him. With a profound squeeze of relief he recognized the small wrinkled eyes and thick lips of the bootlegger whom he, the Judge himself, had patronized for the last half dozen years. God, he was glad it was Rabbus!

To the old man's surprise, the failing black man stirred and whispered.

"Ah . . . Ah saw ye . . . Jedge . . . knew it was . . . you . . . tell . . . tell Mist' Jim . . . couldn't shoot . . . he daddy . . . Ah'm . . . crapped out." And he hushed whispering.

The old white man stood up and looked at the negro. Desultory shots continued further on in the swamp. Then the Judge knew the mob was firing at the place where they thought the murderer was hidden. He cupped his hands buglewise and shouted at the top of his high cracked voice,

"Hey men! I got him! Ho, fellows, I got Blue Pill!"

Then in the headiest excitement he started wading toward the drumming. He hallooed almost at every tenth step,

"He's not where you-all are! He give you the slip! I got him comin' back!"

The Judge knew his cracked voice could not carry against the noises ahead, but he could not hush. He leaned against the deepening water and pushed onward, yelling as he went.

Presently, a long way off, he saw a hound loping toward him, keeping around the boles of the cypresses for a somewhat dry footing. As it came closer, the old man recognized Belle. As the bitch drew nearer, she let out a dismal wail, plashed around the Judge and fell in whimpering at his heels.

The old man was somehow alarmed. It was an extraordinary thing for Belle to do. He looked around at her, snapped his fingers and said,

"Belle, Belle, what's the matter, girl?"

Then he hurried on to where the mob still hallooed and whooped and occasionally fired a gun.

The old lawyer could not understand why Belle had not picked up the black man's scent as he stole away. She should have pointed him in the air. As he stumbled forward among the submerged knees the hound behind him whimpered more and more loudly and finally stopped on a patch of earth around a cypress trunk. The Judge

spent ten seconds trying to get her to follow. He scolded her for cowardice. He wondered if she suddenly had gone gun-shy. Then he waded on more hurriedly than ever toward the loudening noises of the mob.

Then he saw three men with guns coming toward him. The three waded homeward with a queer effect of springiness and tension. The old lawyer halloed and asked what the men were still shooting at.

One of the waders began, "We jest strung up . . ." when the second man said something in a lowered tone. The first man ceased talking. The trio stopped wading and looked at the Judge.

"You-all didn't find Blue Pill did you?" called the Judge.

"Yeh! Yeh!" cried all three with a queer unanimity, "Yeh, we got him . . . he's back there . . ." and they veered off through the swamp as if on some common impulse.

At this point a queer notion came into Judge Gilroy's head. He wondered if he could possibly have had an illusion of killing Blue Pill Rabbus eight minutes before. He wondered if he really had shot the negro?

The old lawyer's heart quickened and he waded on as fast as his shaky legs would move. In his haste he stumbled over cypress knees and almost fell. He held his rifle aloft. He bumped and bruised himself. He was approaching the place of the present shooting; an old deer's stand which he had used in his youth. Then, a long distance from the place, the old man saw, through a gap in the cypresses, a crook-necked figure, a small distant thing, hanging from a limb.

The old lawyer pushed forward, stumbling and slipping with his eyes fixed on this object. He wondered, in his soul, had he killed Blue Pill. As he went closer he saw twenty or thirty of the mob coming back from the lynching. They were talking in sharp and excited sentences among themselves when the old Judge called in a high wondering voice,

"Boys . . . who . . . who was it you . . . strung up?"

At his shout, a peculiar silence swept in over the group. All the men stopped and stared at the old lawyer. Somebody said in a grey tone,

"That's Judge Gilroy!"

Another voice swore tautly,

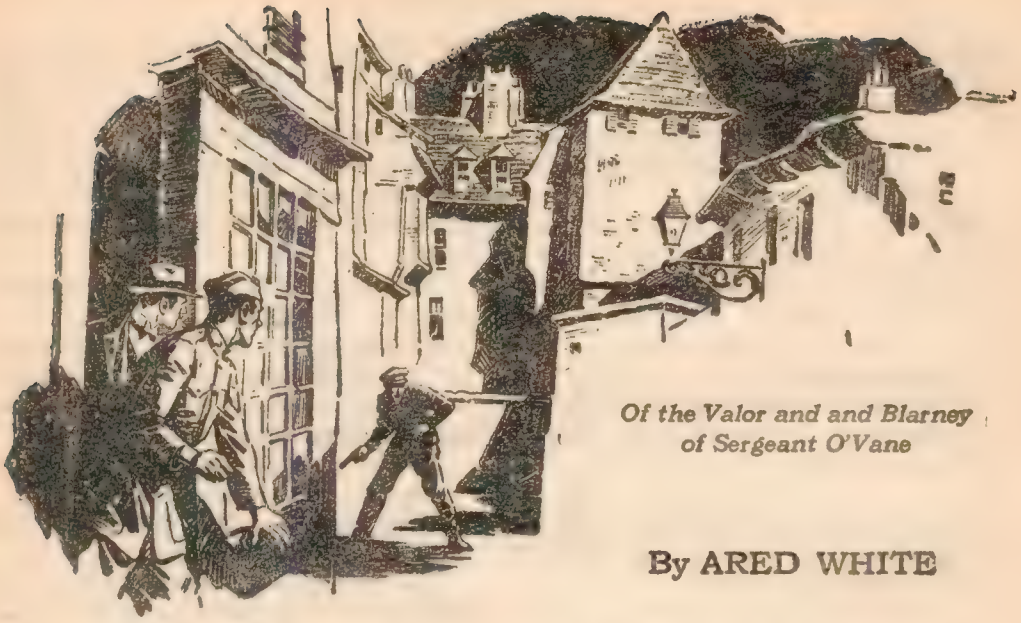
"Hell far . . . he'll know ever' one of us . . . the gran' jury'll . . ."

The old jurist was about to shout out that he was no informer when a third and bolder voice took command and spoke out. It said,

"Judge, you see what we've done. The two of them killed Deputy Jack Henderson when all he was doing was trying to enforce the liquor license law. The nigger got away. The hounds wouldn't chase him after we strung Jim up. We're not sorry about Jim, because he was drunk with the nigger and we b'lieve both of 'em he'ped kill the constable. You can do what you want to . . . indict us, sue us for damages . . . or let it drop. But from now on, Judge, nobody in this county, either white or black, is going to shoot down a officer trying to enforce a fair law and then squirm out of it in the courts."

But the Judge wasn't listening. He was looking at his son . . . and all he could hear was the voice of Sam Lannam, whining:

"I didn't know, Judge, honest I didn't. And Jim, my own kinfolk. I didn't know . . . honest . . ."



Of the Valor and and Blarney of Sergeant O'Vane

By ARED WHITE

The Order of St. Peter

SERGEANT Michael O'Vane, D.S.C. and, according to the adjutant's estimate, prince of goldbrickers, eased into Colonel Amon Blackwell's private office at a moment when the regimental staff was off guard. The colonel looked up from the pile of summary court cases that had been mounting steadily since the regiment crossed the Rhine, registered a momentary annoyance, then settled back in patient inquiry.

"Sir, the Colonel has heard the saying that anything can happen down in Paris these days with all the Peace Commission nabobs on the job," O'Vane began auspiciously, his leathery face intent, his small greenish eyes burning with a peculiar animation. "What I wanted to ask of the Colonel was a great favor—but not for meself—a ten days' furlough to visit Paris, sir."

"Did you put your request up to my adjutant?" the colonel asked rather sharply. "Seems to me you had a pass to Coblenz only last week, O'Vane."

"Sure, but it's no pleasure trip of me own, sir," O'Vane pleaded with an injured look. "It's the regiment I'm thinking of. In the *Stars and Stripes* this morning I read that me old friend, Honorable Thomas Delaney, is in the big city with his friend, President Wilson. Sure, sir, Delaney's one of the President's special peace workers—and I'm wanting to have a good chat with him about things."

Colonel Blackwell's brows met.

"I think you'd better stay out of Paris and look after your work here," he said with prompt decisiveness. "Leaves to Paris are being held down for the time being."

Colonel Blackwell dipped his pen with finality. But Sergeant O'Vane lost nothing of his confidence. His argument was carefully plotted; and he knew the Blackwell vanity was a thing to be fed in homeopathic doses, a weakness that left the regimental commander putty in O'Vane's skilful hands.

"But, sir, I'm asking the Colonel, is there another regiment done more to win this war?" He spoke with emphasis

and feeling. "What credit does the old outfit get for that, sir? Isn't it us, more 'n any of them, chased the Boches back of the Rhine? So far, do we get a thank you from anybody higher up? Sir, knowing Honorable Tom Delaney, what I want is to put a bug in his ear, so he can slip it into the ear of President Wilson."

Colonel Blackwell gave O'Vane a startled look, shifted uneasily in his chair, his large black eyes blinking nervously. O'Vane pressed his advantage quickly.

"Sir, it wasn't any messing in I was going to do. Delaney's me old friend. I handled the Fifth Ward for him when he was elected to Congress, and he says to me, sir, when I joined up for the war last year, he says, 'Mike, if you ever want anything, all you got to do is chirp.' Now, sir, for the first time, I'm about to chirp. Not for meself, but for me regiment. The colonel maybe don't know how the enlisted men all feel about it, over the way that 846th Infantry was decorated—and our own colonel never got anything but a lousy Croix de Guerre from the French."

Colonel Blackwell chewed his upper lip for several moments and beat a contemplative tattoo with nervous fingers on the heap of summary court papers.

"Dangerous business, Sergeant," he said presently, though his tone lacked firmness. He looked up placidly after a time. "I appreciate your sentiment, Sergeant—and the feelings of my men. It's too true that my regiment hasn't had the recognition it deserves. But it seems to me the farther we keep away from Paris with our troubles the better."

"Yes, sir," assented O'Vane. A conniving smile wreathed his wide, round face. "I get the idea—and all I asks is a ten-day pass to visit Paris. The Colonel knows nothing whatever of me intentions. But, confidentially, remembering the Colonel's kindness to me and all the men, I want to see Delaney bad enough, sir, to walk to Paris if I have to."

BLACKWELL made a hurried summary. In many ways O'Vane was a consummate pest. Such soldiers as O'Vane, and such intimacies of conversation, were possible only in a wartime service. O'Vane, keeper of a gymnasium and bowling alley in civil life, claimed allegiance with the leaders of his party when out of uniform, naming as intimates many aldermen, several mayors, a few governors, innumerable Congressmen and two Senators.

Blackwell would have taught the fellow his place in the ranks long ago except that O'Vane, from the colonel's point of view, seemed to have a special aptitude for expressing the thoughts and sentiments of the men in the ranks toward their commander. More than once Colonel Blackwell had suspected flattery. But he liked the substance of what O'Vane had to say, and O'Vane's fine spirit of loyalty toward higher authority. And, when the adjutant had remarked on one or two occasions that O'Vane was an incurable flatterer and conscienceless goldbrick, the colonel remembered that O'Vane had been fighting man enough to win the D.S.C. by capturing forty prisoners in front of Sedan.

O'Vane's eyes sparkled triumph while the colonel debated; and now that he sensed the certainty of furlough, he studied the form of his next coup.

"Well, if you want to go to Paris for your own pleasure, I'm inclined to let you have ten days," the colonel yielded shortly. He dipped his pen again and looked at O'Vane with severity. "But forget that—er—Delaney business and keep out of mischief. The adjutant will fix up your orders. That's all."

"Thank you, sir," O'Vane responded heartily. "The Colonel will never regret his kindness to the sergeant. Sir, there's just one thing more, if the Colonel don't mind. I'll have it back to you payday—but I'm needing a hundred francs for me expenses."

"I supposed, of course," Colonel

Blackwell muttered, his face clouding, "that you had funds, or you wouldn't have asked for a pass."

"Sir, it was only this morning I read that Delaney is in Paris, and I sent the last of me money home a week ago." He added tentatively, in a small voice, "But if the Colonel's short, I can wire me friend Delaney to send up a hundred francs."

"I suppose I can let you have it," Colonel Blackwell yielded with a wry grimace. He extracted two crisp banknotes from his billfold and extended them. "But that makes a total of three hundred francs you owe me, Sergeant, and I'll expect you to start liquidating next payday."

In the outer office Captain Gordon, regimental adjutant, glared malevolence as he had the sergeant-major make out a ten days' pass for Sergeant O'Vane. The order typed, Gordon held it in abeyance several moments while he delivered his own brief estimate of the situation. And then he added a terse ultimatum:

"I'm going to be damn frank with you this time, O'Vane. You've slipped in there and hornswoggled the colonel for the last time. You're a goldbricker; and except for snapping into it long enough to get that D.S.C.—in your case I ought to call it d-s-ceit—you've never done a day's honest duty since you enlisted. You overstayed your last two leaves and somehow talked the colonel out of trying you. I'm fed up with you. If you're late coming back this time—or get into a mess down in Paris—I'm going to have those chevrons stripped off once and for all. And I'm going to get you not less than sixty days' confinement from a summary court I'll appoint for that purpose. Do you get it?"

"Was there anything further the Cap'n had to say?" O'Vane inquired quietly through taut lips, meeting the adjutant's glare with very level eyes.

"If there ever is, O'Vane," the captain threatened, "I'll say it with a summary court! Now get out!"

ON THE tenth day thereafter Sergeant O'Vane's wary eyes filled with concern as he rounded a turn in the twisted cobblestones of Rue Pigalle and saw an American M.P. bearing down the street in his direction. By a circuitous route of several miles he had avoided the normal haunts of the military police in Paris in order to reach a friendly billet on Rue Pigalle where he hoped to borrow from a quartermaster lieutenant the twenty francs needed to get back to his regiment, north of Coblenz, in the Army of Occupation.

"Sure and it may be, as the saying goes, anything can happen in Paris," he muttered disgustedly to himself. "But nothing happens to me any more but M.P's and tough breaks."

O'Vane cleared the bilious scowl from his face and the thwarted ego from his bleary eyes and faced the M.P. with the confident savoir faire of an unlucky pocker player intent on seeing a busted flush through a desperate play. If the M.P. asked to see his travel orders, all was lost, particularly if the M.P. succeeded. Those orders were now one day too old. There was trouble enough ahead when he finally got back to Colonel Blackwell's regiment late from furlough. It would be trouble de luxe if the military police took him to their lair on the Rue Ste. Anne with a stale pass. O'Vane took the play into his own hand as the M.P, eyeing him suspiciously, came abreast.

"Here, M.P, you know this Rue Pigalle country?" O'Vane demanded in a voice of authority, halting the other with a peremptory jerk of his thumb.

The M.P. eyed him in surly appraisal.

"Who wants to know?" he asked. "Let me have a squint at your orders, Sarge."

"Cut out your funny business," O'Vane snorted with a threatening glare. "There is a quartermaster lieutenant named Mulrooney lives back here somewhere on Pigalle. The Peace Commission may have business with him for

all you know, and I got to find him. If you're not on any special job, it's up to you to pilot me back to his billet."

The M.P. hesitated, not wholly convinced despite the voice of authority, the sergeant's chevrons and the mention of the great Peace Commission, whose agents were to be found everywhere in Paris on strange missions. O'Vane followed up quickly:

"Come on, speak up! Do you know the lay or don't you? We can't keep the Commission waiting all day while you make up your mind."

"Sure, I know Pigalle like a book," the M.P. conceded. "But I got to get down to Rue Ste. Anne *pronto* and report—"

"Forget it." O'Vane took several francs in small change—his last centime—and extended them airily. "Here's taxi fare back to Rue Ste. Anne when you show me where is Mulrooney's billet. I got no more time to waste. Come on."

The M.P. slouched into step at O'Vane's side and set out toward the address on Pigalle that was Mulrooney's isolated billet. O'Vane's triumph brought him small gratification. There was little glory, to one of his accomplishments, in bending a thick-skulled M.P. to his purpose. Besides, he was steeped in the bitterness of a crushing succession of abject defeats. Paris had repulsed him this ten days past. It had started with sheer bad luck, for on the day he reached the Crillon his friend Delaney had left on a secret mission to Rome. At the Crillon, Delaney's secretary had predicted his return in a few days.

But O'Vane's precious ten days had ticked by—and no Delaney. O'Vane's best efforts to crash other notables of the peace delegations had failed. In New York it had been no trick to reach the executive offices, even at Albany. His resources had been equal to obstacles placed by obdurate underlings. He had learned that great men found interest in his patter, the greatest of them succumbing to his blarney.

But in Paris it was different. The Hotel Crillon was a hive of American personages. Kings, premiers and potentates were to be seen in the Bois de Boulogne of afternoons. Paris was alive with the great and near great, come to hold a post-mortem over the big kill and haggle over the spoils of war. But they were hedged in, all of them, by secretaries and majordomos, by adjutants and underlings, who repulsed O'Vane without compunction. All would have been different with the Honorable Tom Delaney in Paris, O'Vane assured himself. It would have been a simple trick to get himself transferred for duty at the Peace Commission, as a hundred other chosen soldiers had done.

That had been his great purpose in coming to Paris. Now that the war was over, the endless exactions of squads east and west were unendurable to O'Vane's untrammeled soul. He had gambled desperately and lost all. Instead of Paris, where he might shine among the satellites and indulge his gift of flattery to almost any end, having such a time of it as must compare only with Manhattan at election time, he must return to Germany late from leave—and face that adjutant.

Half an hour's walk landed him and his guide at an ancient stone lodging which the M.P. said was the Mulrooney billet. The sun was just rising over Paris; the lieutenant would not be up. O'Vane dismissed the M.P. with a toss of his hand and entered the billet. He had no doubt that Mulrooney would lend him the twenty francs for return to Germany. If necessary, he would leave his pistol as security. But the wolves of adversity were clinging to his heels. A labored exchange with the lean concierge and O'Vane stumbled back out into Rue Pigalle muttering savage imprecations against Paris and all the soft gentry who held station there. Lieutenant Mulrooney was at Nice, resting up on the Mediterranean for ten days from the cruel rigors of the "Battle of Paris."

HE AMBLED on, wracking his brain for the next move. The French pawnbrokers had refused him more than five francs on his service pistol. No use trying there. So there were just two courses open. One, to start afoot for Germany. The other, to wait under cover until Delaney got back from Italy.

"A pretty mess you got yourself into, O'Vane," he addressed himself bitterly. "All you got to do is starve to death—or else go down and give yourself up to the M.P's. Sure, anything can happen in Paris. And—well it's happened!"

But, as if timed to a whim of coincidence, something did happen in the next instant. The heavy whang of a pistol rang in his ears. O'Vane looked up upon a strange drama: A little man in a long cape was frantically doding this way and that while a grimacing fellow in a black smock, pistol in hand, maneuvered for a second shot, the first having gone wild.

Six shots followed, in slow successsion, while the little man frantically dodged to escape death. The assailant, jumping excitedly about in rhythm to the intended victim's movements, fired without aim. With the sixth shot, the gunman cast his smoking revolver aside and drew a second weapon.

"Damn poor marksmanship, I'd call it!" O'Vane exclaimed critically.

He stepped into a doorway to enjoy the spectacle. The man with the gun steadied somewhat and tried to take aim. Two more shots followed, both wild. At this juncture two frantic men, who had been yelling and waving their arms in the background, made a show of closing in on the assailant. The fellow waved his gun toward them in warning. Taking advantage of this interruption, the little man in the long cape bolted. A shot chipped a cobblestone in front of him, and less than a foot to his left. It had the effect of diverting his course to the right. In a frenzy he headed into O'Vane's haven.

What to O'Vane had been a lively spectacle suddenly became his own critical affair when the gunman bore down, pistol leveled. As the little man dodged into the doorway, O'Vane stepped out and held up his hand in warning. But the frenzied gunman paid no attention to the danger of an innocent bystander. A shot crashed into a stone near O'Vane's cheek. He drew his own heavy automatic and stepped forward, scowling savagely.

"Slack up there—or I'll show you a bit of real shooting!" he shouted.

Two frenzied shots in quick succession was the response. O'Vane fired quickly but coolly. The grimacing man in the black frock gave a cry of pain and seized his shattered pistol arm with his left hand as his weapon went clattering to the cobblestones.

Out of the commotion the shriek of whistles smote O'Vane's ears. He saw gendarmes running to the scene, and back of them his M.P. guide. A pretty fix, A.W.O.L. and messing into an apache gunfight. O'Vane's alert mind searched the avenues of escape in a twinkling. There was a taxicab just getting into motion, one that had stalled in front of the clash of arms. Into this he dodged desperately, waving his pistol to the driver in ominous command. The car jolted ahead. The little man in the cape managed to vault into a place beside the driver. O'Vane, as they moved off, saw the fellow in excited speech with the driver. The car gained momentum, eeled its way out of Pigalle in a tortuous route calculated to divert pursuit.

When they came shortly to a wide boulevard in which there was heavy traffic, the little man had the taxi stopped and hailed a second cab. O'Vane saw him tender a large bill from a stuffed wallet and shrug a refusal of any change. His unexpected host ushered him into the second car and, as it sped off, sank back with a sigh of relief.

"We have avoid ze great embarrassment with ze gendarmes, monsieur," he said, turning a thin smile upon O'Vane. "*Mon dieu,* but it was one close call—

and it is to you, monsieur, I am deeply oblige."

"Sure, if that wop could hit a barn, they'd be hauling you to the morgue, mister," O'Vane replied. "But what was the rumpus all about, anyhow? Row over women—or cards? He sure was hot after your carcass."

The little man puzzled over O'Vane's words, evidently trying to fathom the full purport of what was said.

"It is another assassin—perhaps ze agent of ze premier—who come here from Montenegro to kill," the little man said with a shrug. "Three times it is I have escape in Paris." He pursed his lips and shrugged again. "But—it is not my time to die. *Voilà!*"

"Seems to me, with an apache like that on your trail, you'd carry a good gun of your own and learn to shoot, monsewer!" O'Vane said earnestly.

The little man merely shrugged again.

"But why take chances?" O'Vane persisted.

From the moment of sighting that stuffed wallet his mind had been busy with plans for raising at least twenty francs. He brought forth his service pistol and displayed it.

"Where would I been—where'd we both been, if it wasn't for that baby? Sure death at fifty paces; can't miss with it at thirty!"

"You are ze Americaine," the little man turned the subject, obviously not interested in O'Vane's proposal.

"Sure, and that's an American weapon," O'Vane argued, eyeing his .45 automatic affectionately. "With a gun like that you'd be safe anywhere, mister. All you have to do is point it and pull the trigger, which is better 'n dodging about like a scared rabbit while some wobbly pours hot lead at you. I know right where you can get the mate to this weapon for—say fifty francs. Or maybe I'd part with this one, as a special favor. Here, try the feel of it, see what a fine balance it's got in the palm of your mitt."

The little man raised a deprecatory hand and shrugged impatiently.

"My friend, you do not understand," he said quickly. "Perhaps ze next time it is ze bomb, or ze dozen pistols. *Diantre,* but I shall not take ze risk! No, monsieur, I shall not depend upon ze incognito another time in Paris."

"Well, I guess if they're going to kill you, they're going to kill you, if you feel that way about it," O'Vane said, sinking back in the cushions. "If it was me, I'd sure sink fifty francs into some .45 caliber insurance. But I'm not coaxing nobody. If you don't mind, you can drop me off somewhere out along the edge of town."

"Perhaps monsieur will do me ze honor of *petit dejeuner* at my villa at Neuilly," the other spoke up solicitously. "I wish monsieur to know I am very grateful for what monsieur have done in my service."

"I didn't do anything except protect me own carcass from that woolly friend of yourn," O'Vane muttered. "But if you mean a breakfast, that sounds reasonable."

THE little man paused long and intently after O'Vane's every utterance as if able to fathom something of his meaning only with the greatest difficulty. He clapped his hands at sensing O'Vane's acceptance.

"My friends, they will be delight to meet monsieur," he exclaimed, "and to me it shall be ze great honor that you visit my villa. You are ze—" he studied O'Vane's chevrons and collar ornaments with puzzled eyes—"ze officer of infantry, or perhaps artillery?"

"O'Vane, best infantry regiment in France," said O'Vane, then looked out the window and groaned inwardly at remembering his impending rendezvous with the adjutant of that regiment.

"*Bon!*" effused the other, again clapping his hands. "Of all ze troops of my armies, it is ze infantry I love best, monsieur."

O'Vane looked sharply at the little

man. Had he fallen in with a lunatic who talked in such terms, or was this insignificant little Frenchman, whom he had saved from a sunrise brawl, insulting his intelligence?

"What you mean, armies?" he demanded. "Or is it, on account of being a taxpayer, you think you own a interest in the French armies?"

"Ah, but perhaps it is I should present myself, monsieur." The little man smiled, finding no offense in O'Vane's thrust. "I am not ze Frenchman. *Non,* I am in Paris incognito—and to another I should say nothing. But to you I will be frank, monsieur. I am Monsieur Danilo Petrovitch, crown prince of Montenegro."

"Sure you are, mister," said O'Vane, fixing the little man with a caustic smile.

He appraised the thick, loose lips, the sallow skin, the wispy waxed mustache, the sagging lids under dissipated eyes, and the insignificant stature. An underworld dawdler if he'd ever seen one, he concluded. There was no mistaking the type.

"I've heard me friend, King Albert, talk of you so often I feel like I know you, your Highness," he went on. "President Wilson was saying only last night you was in Paris."

"*Bien, monsieur,* I am delight!" responded the little man. "You are ze officer of high rank, yes?"

"I'm Colonel O'Vane, your Majesty," he responded with a mischievous smirk. "O'Vane, D.S.C. and A.W.O.L., detailed to the Peace Commission—almost. Just like you're a crown prince," he chuckled ominously. "Maybe I oughta break me own incog, monsewer, and say if I look soft—I ain't. I'm not wanting to buy shares in the subway, and I don't play roulette, twenty-one, poker with strangers, or whatever's your line. There's only one deal I'm interested in, far as you're concerned; but since you don't want life insurance—even at thirty francs—that's off. Now it's your turn."

The little man blinked pained bewilderment over this speech and finally gave it up. His face relaxed into a smile.

"It is ze very great honor, monsieur," he responded.

THE taxi, following directions the little man had given the driver, crossed the Seine and headed out through the city into a suburb. O'Vane turned his attention to a study of the lay of the land with a watchful eye for M. P. posts and a possible American supply truck headed north or east. But before he had singled out a satisfactory destination, the car slowed down at approaching a high-grilled stone gate that penetrated a long vista of high hedge.

Two men came out from the gate, raised their hands for the vehicle to stop and peered inside cautiously. O'Vane was eyeing them with mingled suspicion and alarm, ready to cope with gendarmes in plainclothes, when the two leaped back, snapped erect and uncovered. The car eased past, turned through the gate and swept down a broad, winding cement driveway to halt in front of an immense, ivy-covered château. There was a scurrying of feet as two men in lurid blue and gold uniform rushed up to open the door of the taxi and stand aside in the manner of staff officers receiving an inspector-general, while the little man emerged. O'Vane's host motioned him out, took his arm lightly and escorted him into a broad reception hall where two other men in uniform took cape and caps with an awed deference.

In response to the little man's terse command in a tongue that did not sound to O'Vane like French, another functionary in livery came in shortly with two glasses of cognac, one of which the little man took from the silver tray and passed to O'Vane.

The little man's hand trembled visibly, still unstrung from the adventure in Rue Pigalle. O'Vane hurried the glass to his lips to avoid spilling it. His

own hand had been seized with a sudden ague, his eyes were staring and his jaws had fallen apart in the confusion that had seized him at this unexpected arrival.

"Sure, sir, that's the best licker I ever tasted," O'Vane exclaimed, smacking his lips.

His host gave further instructions, bowed to O'Vane and disappeared. One of the majordomos took O'Vane in tow, ushered him to a luxurious apartment on an upper floor and furnished razor and towels. While O'Vane, his mind busy with this new enigma of existence, shaved himself, his breakfast was brought in—a prodigal meal topped by a bottle of burgundy.

But, his first confusion past, O'Vane did not jump to hasty conclusions. O'Vane was a cautious man and knew life in Paris had many deep wiles and dangerous ramifications. The little man had been revealed as a person of parts and substance. But that Crown Prince Danilo business was laying it on thick, he reflected as he ate. For one thing, what would a crown prince be doing on Rue Pigalle at sunrise without an armed bodyguard? Might he not be a king of rogues, an underworld leader, an intriguer, even a German agent?

O'Vane reenacted the scene. Might not the man he shot have been a French gendarme in disguise? What kind of stew might he have fallen into? But, also, wasn't Paris full of kings and princes, potentates and statesmen? Might not his luck have changed after all and thrown his trail across that of a masquerading nobleman, even Prince Danilo?

While he was in this troubled cogitation, the door opened upon three men in uniform. Leading the parade was the little man, now attired in a gilt and gray uniform, across his breast an array of orders and decorations. With him was a French officer of middle age and a solemn old man, with militant white whiskers, in uniform similar to that worn by the little man. In the daze of formal presentation, in broken English, O'Vane was left red and speechless by the coup of the whiskered man who rushed suddenly upon him, seized him stoutly by the shoulders and planted a resonant kiss on either cheek.

"*Monsieur le Colonel,* you have sav' Montenegro!" he cried. "You are ze great hero, ze saviour of hees Highness, for which many million hearts sing wiz gratitude. *Le bon dieu,* but can not spik ze thanks!"

"Sure, it wasn't nothing," O'Vane stammered, when he found his tongue. "I'd of done that much for a Chink tongman, if the play'd come up like that."

A FOURTH man entered bearing a tray of glasses containing a greenish liquor and departed silently. The three visitors sat down, sipped at their glasses and talked volubly with many excited gestures. Listening to their patter, O'Vane's jaw slowly sagged, his eyes grew tense and staring. There had been a secret conference at daybreak in the remote Rue Pigalle with secret agents of the Montenegrin crown lately arrived from Cettinje.

Prince Danilo was in Paris with the king and royal family, a fugitive from Teuton intriguers who had driven Nicholas from his throne by force of arms. France was aiding the royal party, intent on stripping away the last vestiges of Prussian influence in Montenegro. And this little man was really the crown prince. The excited chatter in broken English among the three over the morning's events removed the last vestige of O'Vane's remaining doubts.

The little man rose finally, bringing the wagging tongues to instant silence. O'Vane got up awkwardly and stood in awed discomfort while the crown prince stepped up to lay a friendly hand on his shoulder.

"*Monsieur le Colonel*—and my good friend," said Prince Danilo, "it is that we have trespass much upon your good

patience; but is it that you can remain in my villa for ze ceremony of ze Order of St. Peter?"

"Sir, your Honor, I'm late with some business up in Germany," O'Vane said nervously.

"But, if you please, monsieur, I will detain you but ze hour, perhaps not so long," the little man pleaded. "It is that I wish to prepare for you ze Order of St. Peter and give to you with my own hands ze cross for your service, monsieur."

"Sure, your Highness, an hour or two don't matter, just as long as I get moving on the Rhine sometime pretty quick."

"*Merci, monsieur.*" The crown prince removed his hand from O'Vane's shoulder, saluted and turned to depart, announcing, "My general will receive ze name and inscription for ze citation, monsieur. Ze ceremony, it shall occur at once."

A decoration. O'Vane's pulse dropped as the little man left with the French officer. He answered absently as Danilo's general, notebook in hand, pressed him in polite deference for name, rank and details of the citation. Why had his faculties frozen on him in the critical moment of his great opportunity? Why hadn't he spoken up? Sergeant O'Vane might have come in for a reward more satisfying than a gilded bauble to pin on his chest beside his D.S.C. Colonel O'Vane, of course, had to be handled differently, rewarded politely, judiciously, lest his dignity find offense.

"Sure, just write down me name plain Michael O'Vane, leaving the colonel off," he argued absently. "I never went in much for frills."

"Ze spelling, monsieur," Danilo's general urged apologetically. "Eet is ver' *difficile* for me—ze name Americaine. Plees, will you write eet for me—ze name, ze rank, ze regiment. *Merci bien, mon Colonel.*"

"As O'Vane took the extended pencil from the general's hand, the germ of an idea leaped into his mind. His faculties suddenly regained their vitality; the idea elaborated itself into a tangible, glorious entity. His eyes sparkled with the new impulse of his animation; he took the pen with a stout hand and held it poised over the general's pad for a brief moment, then with a meticulous care in the shaping of each letter set down the legend for the royal Montenegrin citation.

In the twenty minutes that elapsed before the general returned with the engrossed citation to escort him to the ceremony below, O'Vane regained his spine as well as his wits and planned the last detail of a glorious deliverance. A final word, alone with Prince Danilo, would settle the matter. Under crystal chandeliers in the great reception hall of the Château, with the crown prince himself officiating, O'Vane received on his left breast, to the left of his Distinguished Service Cross, the Order of St. Peter, a colorful little bauble done in gold and enamel. Also Danilo handed him the official citation, done on parchment with name written in black with many broad, graceful flourishes of a pen wielded by a skilful secretary.

Prince Danilo, the medal in place, seized the hero by the shoulders and kissed his cheeks while the others stood at salute. This done, the others pressed about him. O'Vane, beet-red, fended off further male embraces by thrusting forth his wide hands to be wrung while he stood muttering inarticulate responses to their congratulations. The French officer, coming up last, clung to his hand while delivering a final staccato of gratitude.

"Monsieur have save France the great embarrassment," he announced, and thrust a card into O'Vane's hand. "Ah, but if monsieur will permit me to present him to my Colonel l'Ourcq at the Deuxième Bureau—" he leaned forward and whispered—"perhaps it is that the colonel will recommend for monsieur the Cross of Commandant of the Legion of Honor."

"His royal Highness have place at

disposal hees automobile," the general broke in, prompted by Prince Danilo, who must have remembered as host that time pressed his deliverer.

O'Vane, finding himself put gently in motion toward the door, asserted himself for his final bold play. He turned resolutely to the crown prince.

"Sir, if I can whisper a word in your ear, sir," he pleaded. "Sure, a word, a word or two I got to say in private, your royal Excellence."

"*Certainement,*" said Danilo with an obliging smile, and led his American guest aside into an alcove.

"Sure, sir, I'm sorry to mention it," O'Vane drove straight to business, "but I'm finding meself in a tight pinch—got to catch me train and needing thirty francs." He reached for his pistol, intent on closing a quick deal. "I'll leave me pistol for the loan, which'll sure be a big accommodation, your Highness."

Of the many emotions that flitted across Danilo's features, pained amazement rose dominant. He held out a quick, protesting hand as O'Vane produced the disputed weapon.

"*Mais non,* my friend," he said feelingly. "If it is that monsieur require some francs for ze emergency, permit me ze great honor." He brought from his pocket the stuffed wallet, extracted a large, florid banknote and extended it with a polite bow. O'Vane's bulging eyes caught the marking—1000 francs. "If monsieur will accept ze little favor, I will be most grateful."

O'Vane's fingers closed dazedly on the French banknote that Danilo had pressed firmly in his palm.

"Sure, sir," he exclaimed in confused delight, "I'm not a kissin' man—but I'm sure obliged to you, your Reverence. You've sure saved me hide in more ways than one, sir."

UPON entering the regimental billeting area, Sergeant O'Vane removed the cross of St. Peter from his breast and put it in the bellows pocket of his coat. He marked with sure step straight to headquarters and into the adjutant's office.

"Sergeant O'Vane reporting back for duty from pass to Paris," he announced coolly.

Captain Gordon's face puckered in a disagreeable smirk as he looked up.

"You mean Private O'Vane is reporting in to the hoosgow, don't you think?" The adjutant sneered.

"Sir, Sergeant O'Vane requests the Cap'n's permission to speak with the colonel," O'Vane replied evenly.

"The colonel doesn't wish to be bothered with Sergeant O'Vane," the adjutant retorted.

"It's a report I got to make to me regimental commander, sir!"

"Yes? Well, this time you'll do your reporting to a summary court that I've got all set for you. That's what I promised you if you came back late—and I'm keeping my word." He turned to his sergeant-major. "Are those O'Vane charges and specifications ready for action, Sergeant?"

"They're on the colonel's desk, sir. I'll get them."

Coloney Blackwell entered from his private sanctum, attracted by the unwonted commotion. His face darkened at sight of O'Vane.

O'Vane spoke quickly.

"Sir, Sergeant O'Vane wants permission for a private word with me regimental commander. It'll take only a minute of the Colonel's time, sir."

"If it relates to your return late from pass, Sergeant," the colonel said dourly, "I think it will be entirely unnecessary for you to discuss the matter with me."

"No, sir, it's not any excuses, sir," O'Vane said, maintaining his air of solemn dignity. "Something private, sir."

"I just told O'Vane, sir, that he could do his talking to a summary court," Captain Gordon interposed.

"Nevertheless," Colonel Blackwell decided, after looking severely from one to the other, "I have never refused to listen to any soldier of my command

who insisted on a private word with me. You may come in, O'Vane, but I warn you in advance that I'm not interested in your inexcusable tardiness."

"Sir," O'Vane began, across the top of the colonel's private desk as soon as the regimental commander was seated, "I have to report that me friend, Honorable Thomas Delaney, was absent in Italy, and I waited for him—"

"That is your own affair, O'Vane, and of no interest to me," Colonel Blackwell cut him off.

"But, sir, I was just going to say—I did run across Crown Prince Danilo down in Paris; and by staying over I was able to bring back to me regimental commander these little compliments from his Highness."

O'Vane laid on the desk the engrossed citation, and on top of it the gold and enamel Order of St. Peter. Colonel Blackwell's nettled eyes searched O'Vane's face as to his sanity or sobriety, then focused upon the parchment. His brows contracted as he read. There was duly set down, with many flourishes his own name: Colonel Amon Blackwell, U. S. Army, and after it the citation, "By decree of his royal Majesty, Nicholas I, awarded the Order of St. Peter for exceptionally distinguished services to Montenegro in the Allied Cause."

"I hardly understand, Sergeant," Blackwell gasped, looking up in the throes of his perplexity. "What—"

"Sure, sir, it was little enough for the king to do, seeing what this outfit's done over here for him, sir. Me own interest was seeing the old outfit get credit, sir, and me own colonel get what's coming to him. All the men'll sure be proud to see that medal on the Colonel's chest."

It required several moments for Colonel Blackwell to orient himself. He examined the citation again, studied its wording, the whorls of the lettering, the intricate shapings of the Imperial seal, the scrawly signature of a general of the royal army which attested the document. There was no questioning its authenticity, or the medal that accompanied it. Colonel Blackwell held the cross up to his breast, and his taut mouth softened in satisfaction. A magnificent addition to his humble Croix de Guerre. It required only a formal authorization from G.H.Q. and the glory was his forever.

"This is rather a surprise, O'Vane," he said presently in some embarrassment, rising. "But I want you to know I appreciate the loyal interest you have shown. After all—er—it is an honor to my entire regiment, an honor to you as well as to me, even though I am singled out, necessarily, as the regimental commander. Thank you, O'Vane."

"Sir, it meant more to me for me Colonel to get that medal than if I'd got it meself," O'Vane said fervently. He took from his pocket a new French banknote and held it reluctantly forward as he added in a feeble voice, "Sure, sir, I was also wanting to pay the Colonel back a hundred francs on account."

Colonel Blackwell eyed the bill uncertainly for a moment, then waved it aside.

"Forget it, O'Vane," he said generously. "I hardly think under the circumstances that the expenses of your trip to Paris should fall upon you personally."

"Thank you, sir," O'Vane rejoined, hurriedly pocketing the money. "Maybe it'll come in handy when me friend, the Honorable Tom Delaney, gets back from Italy. Sure, sir, Delaney can help me pick off a French Legion de Honor I got a line on for the Colonel next time I go down to Paris—with the Colonel's kind permission, sir."

Two Divers Dead

By Richard Howells Watkins

MARK QUILLAN stood in the stern of the fisherman's dory. His stocky figure was braced on thick legs spread apart. Under a gray Autumn sky and over a leaden sea, with a few curling whitecaps here and there, the boat leaped and slashed her erratic way. The northeast wind was cold.

Out of the shelter of Duck Island Roads the dory headed toward the entrance where the salvage tug *Favor* lay to two anchors on the edge of the fairway. Mark saw that work on the dynamiting of the sunken steel barge *Anroy No. 19*, for which the *Favor* had the contract, had stopped.

The Connecticut fisherman, a lean, narrow-headed Yankee with light blue eyes, glanced covertly at his passenger as the stricken sound of the red bellbuoy, lurching in the sea within fifty feet of the tug, came to them.

"Tolling for them below, young fellow," he said solemnly to Mark Quillan.

Quillan chewed stolidly on a wad of gum.

"Sounds like an ordinary bellbuoy to me," he said at last.

The fisherman snorted.

"Two divers went down to her—first a young 'un about your age, and then an old 'un. Neither of 'em came up. You better think a bit before you go under."

"I'm thinking," Quillan stated. "How'd the barge come to do her dive right smack by the entrance like that?"

"Well—" the fisherman considered—"y'know the Sound freighter hit the barge, which was under tow, in a fog. Put a hole in the port side o' the barge an' carried one o' her masts overside."

Mark Quillan nodded. They were closing up on the salvage tug.

"Then the towboat cap'n got excited, I reckon, an' tried to get her into the harbor o' refuge to beach her b'fore she sank. Scrap iron, she had in her. Draggin' her along, with the water comin' in fast, he—I mean the barge—fouled that bell. An' before he could git himself unscrambled, down she went, right where

t'would cost her owners, or somebody, some money to clear the channel again. An' destroyin' her's cost money an' two lives so far."

"Sounds like an easy job, too," Mark Quillan commented mildly.

He caught a heaving line flung from the tug, and the fisherman eased his boat in alongside the restless *Favor*. A couple of glum deckhands dropped from the tug into the fishing boat to get his gear aboard. Mark paid the fisherman, slung his suitcase over the rail and climbed aboard the salvage tug.

Old Pedersen, master of the *Favor* and acting as wreck-master on this small job, met the diver on deck. Without a word he dragged his heavy feet up to the pilothouse with Quillan behind him. Pedersen's face, furry as an Airdale's, was as morose as usual.

"Northeaster making up," the old man muttered, with a jerk of his head toward the overcast sky to eastward. Soon we got to lift our hooks and get into Duck Island, behind them stone breakwaters."

"A northeaster gives plenty of warning, even at this end of the Sound," Mark answered. "How about this job, Nels?"

Captain Pedersen clenched a fist and shook it at the gray, restless water that covered the *Anroy No. 12*.

"I tell you about this job," he said through his teeth. "We got eight tons of dynamite aboard. We drop it down on to her deck—the whole lot of it—and we blow the damn hulk to hell!"

"You might as well try to spread her out on the sand with a pack of firecrackers," the diver said in a level voice. "These Army engineers are hard boiled. They won't pass the job unless they get the right depth of water all over this area."

"Damn the engineers—and the contract too!" Pedersen blazed. He shook his fist suddenly at the red bellbuoy almost alongside. "And damn that jangling bell! I have a goot crew, Mark Quillan, but this job has taken the heart out of them! We blow her up—there is plenty dynamite in the world!"

"Dynamite's got to be placed under her hatches, along her sides, bow and stern, and around her masts and heavy machinery," the diver said. "And how about those two bodies—still in the wreck, aren't they?"

Nels Pedersen winced at this straightforward mention of the thing he had avoided. Then, with sudden violence, he whirled about and in an instant was confronting Mark, with a length of hose in either hand.

"You look!" he commanded. "This is young Austin's hose and this is Dave Gore's—the ends we got up. Do they look right to you, Quillan?"

THE diver took Dave Gore's piece of hose with a slow hand. It was a regulation air hose, slightly more than an inch in external diameter but only half an inch in bore. Five layers, three of rubber and two of linen, made up that air line. It was constructed to stand a test pressure of five hundred pounds to the square inch, and it was tough. But this piece ended in a ragged cut.

Mark Quillan looked hard at that cut. It was not a clean shear such as a sharp knife or a hacksaw would make, but an irregular severance.

"Tell me it is chafed, why don't you?" Pedersen demanded with heavy irony. "Chafed by a guillotine, maybe! And this other piece—that is chafed, no doubt? And the lifeline—and telephone cable—parted in the same way!"

"Any strain on these when they let go?"

Pedersen peered at him sharply.

"You think maybe the tender had a grudge against those two, hey?" he asked. "Or maybe, after all these years, he don't know his business? What strain there was was from the tide alone and each time it was about slack water."

"Tell me what you know about it, Cap'n," the diver said soothingly.

"Jack Austin went down yesterday

afternoon about four to plant dynamite boxes. The tide is too strong here to work except at the slack. They were regular fifty-pound boxes. We figured it would take four or five tons to split her up good. His orders were to start shoving the boxes we lowered to him down the hold through a hatch joost aft of her foremast. The scrap metal in her did not half fill the hold; there was plenty of room on top of the cargo for a diver to drag boxes fore an' aft."

Mark Quillan nodded.

"Dave Gore had been down to look over the wreck. He told young Austin joost where to place the boxes. Austin had taken six we lowered on his descending line. Each time he took about thirty feet more slack on his line when he went into the hold to place a box. Then, suddenly, he spoke to me. I was his telephone tender. His voice sounded funny.

" 'More air!' he said. 'More air! What you think—air! For God's sake—'

"Then, again, he cried for air. After that, nothing. The telephone was dead. I yelled to Charley Lind, his tender, and the others, to try to get him up. Charley joost took up the slack—no more—and then the lines came up parted."

Pedersen raised his shoulders.

"Dave Gore got into his suit in a hurry. Everybody was in a hurry. Dave was on the ladder, ready for his helmet, when that dumb Berger, leaning overside to hand the helmet to Charley, lost his balance. He fell into the sea with it. The fool came up and we pulled him aboard, but Dave's helmet is gone. And no other helmet on board."

"Then Dave went down at morning slack water?"

Captain Pedersen nodded.

"Before dawn today—with another helmet and breastplate from shore—he went down. He wanted to get up Austin's body, finish the job and get oudt of here. For six hours we had waited—with that bellbuoy clanging, clanging, clanging over Jack Austin. Dave had trained Austin—like he trained you—and Dave had sent him down. He wanted to get up that body, to see what had happened. The new gear reached us just in time. Also another diver the office sent—Tom Hall."

He stopped to wipe his forehead.

"Well, Dave goes down around slack water. We have rigged lights. With him he takes a thousand-watt underwater light. Charley gives him slack—six fathom to the deck—then more, maybe another six. Only then when he had taken so much, does he speak to me.

" 'I'm below in the bow on top of the scrap,' he says.

'Can't see Austin; haven't picked up his lines. I can make out a couple o' boxes of dynamite. I'm moving aft to—'

"He stopped talking then—or maybe he didn't. But I didn't hear his voice any more. Joost a crackle in the headphones, and then I knew it was a dead wire. I yell to Charley.

"Charley Lind is standing by the rail. Spray is flying over him as a sea slaps the side, but he looks like stone. He turns his head to me, still with his hand on Dave's lines.

" 'It's like he's foul,' he says to me. 'There's no life in these lines. I can't feel him no more.'

" 'The phone's gone dead!' I yell at him, and he takes a tighter hold on the line and 'ones' Dave to see if he's all right. Dave don't answer that jerk. But suddenly Charley stares at the lifeline an' air hose, where they sink down into the water overside. Then he looks at me.

"The lines are slack, drifting eastward with the new tide. There's no weight on them—no weight at all on the bottom. Charley feels them with his face twisted up but it's no use. Dave is gone.

"Charley pulls in the lines. They're like you see them."

Captain Pedersen pointed a blunt, calloused finger at the serrated end of the air hose. "Like that," he said.

"Then what happened?" Mark Quillan asked.

"Tom Hall, the new diver, gets ready to go down. He's standing by in his diving underwear under his clothes and they get him into his suit with a rush. He keeps looking at the end of Dave Gore's air hose until Charley Lind disconnects the section and gets it out of sight. Then he fiddles with the knife in his belt and kicks about the inside bib of his suit not being pulled up smooth.

"They get him away, with another light fastened to his chest. He slides down the descending line. That line hasn't carried away since we been here, though it's ordinary one-inch manila."

Mark Quillan nodded.

"Hall went down," he prompted. "Did he—"

"Hall takes about five fathom over the side. We watch. He is slow. Suddenly he cuts his air, and his voice yells over the wire at me:

"'Get me up out o' here,' he says. 'I'm over the deck, but the tide is sweeping me away. I can't do anything. Get me up!'

"Well, by that time it's certain Dave is dead, so it's no use scaring Hall to death. His voice sounds bad. The tide *is* setting out, too. We start to bring him up, but he'd opened his air control valve already. So he come to the surface faster than Charley could take in the slack."

PEDERSEN jerked a hand toward the shore.

"Hall went ashore in the boat when I sent Charley Lind ashore to telephone a report to the office. Charley says he was lapping them up in a speak when he was ready to start back. And he told Charley to take his job to hell with him."

"No other diver on board, then?"

"You're the only one," answered the captain. He gripped Mark Quillan by the shoulder. "That's why you shouldn't go down. We drop that stuff on her deck and all around her, boy, and then lower a box with a detonator in it. Them bodies have gone downtide long ago—we blow this hulk to hell. Then we get away."

His faded blue eyes were appealing.

"Sounds like Jack an' Dave were both in the hold when the lines went," Mark said slowly. "What do you reckon cut them?"

"What cut them will cut yours," Nels Pedersen said with solemn conviction.

"I'll have a look, anyhow," Mark replied. He glanced toward the bellbuoy, which was still tugging at its mooring under the urge of the flood tide. "How soon's slack water?"

"Soon enough," muttered the wreckmaster.

He looked distrustfully toward the east, where the unseen entrances to the Sound drew together, making this a funnel for the tides to race through.

"D'you know what a northeaster blowing in the Sound does in the way o' kickin' up the sea?"

"Considerable, I've heard," Mark answered placidly.

"Enough, if it keeps on pipin' up, to make us drag our anchors. Even if things was right below I oughtn't to let you dive."

"You can't hold a job as wreck-master by keeping high priced divers on the top," Mark said. He jerked his head toward the gray east. "You can't call this a gale o' wind yet."

"You got nerve, Mark, but you ain't got no imagination," Pedersen snapped.

"Sure I've got nerve," the diver conceded. "Imagination, no. Down on the bottom, fumbling in the dark, with pressure riding my back and things in the water drifting against me, I don't need imagination. I'll be getting ready."

"You want somebody besides Charley Lind to tend you?"

"No. Charley's a good tender. Why shouldn't he tend me?"

"I don't know," Pedersen muttered. "I was just askin', that's all. I want you to be easy in your mind."

"I'll be easy," Mark Quillan assured

him. "What d'you suppose killed those two guys?"

"What're you askin' me for?" the wreck-master snapped. His gray face went red with sudden, uncontrolled wrath. "If I knew, would I be this way?" He raised a wrinkled hand and watched it shake. Then he stabbed a finger toward the bellbuoy. "Would that blasted bell be playin' tunes on my spine like a harp if I knew? Would that young fella an' Dave Gore be dead if I could ha' foreseen anything?"

"Ease off!" Mark Quillan said soothingly. "I just happened to ask, that's all."

"You just happened to ask!" Pedersen growled. "Hell!"

MARK QUILLAN, in two suits of diving underwear, crawled into his canvas and rubber suit with the help of Charley Lind and another hand. Lind's round red face was screwed up into a grin of concentration as he lifted the heavy breastplate over Mark's head and carefully fitted the holes in the collar of the suit over the studs in the breastplate. He set on the straps and bolted them down with painstaking care.

"That's right, anyhow," Lind said a little hoarsely. "There's nothing wrong with your gear, Mark—"

The top of a biggish sea had come leaping over the rail and splashed into the helmet held upside down in the hands of his waiting assistant.

Charley Lind snatched the helmet from the man and peered into it.

"That water'll short the telephone, sure," he snapped anxiously.

"Put it on and forget it," Mark Quillan commanded, with a glance at the bellbuoy. The incoming tidal stream was plainly slackening, but the bell, under the impact of the choppy seas, still tugged heavily at its mooring. "It'll take too much time to put in another transmitter. I'd rather have a dead telephone than a lively tide dragging me along the deck."

"Hand signals?" Charley asked, scowling.

"Right," Mark Quillan agreed. "Don't miss any, either. They may come fast —particularly four jerks."

He grinned, but no one grinned with him. Four is the signal to bring up the diver.

"We'll haul ya fast," assured the man who had let the helmet get wet.

"You'd haul him in half!" Pedersen rasped. He still kept on his earphones.

They helped Mark over to the rail, twisted and locked down the helmet and attached the lines. A thousand-watt under-water lamp was lashed on his chest.

On the ladder, with the descending line between his hands, Mark Quillan stepped slowly down into the water. It was bitter cold to his hands, for he wore no gloves.

Mark heard one tap on the top of his helmet, the signal from his tender that all was well. The air was rushing steadily into his helmet from a high pressure tank on the deck of the *Favor*. But that tap meant he was cut off from all ordinary communication with men. He was alone now.

He wrapped a leg around the descending line, opened his exhaust valve a trifle wider to cut his buoyancy and slipped down under the surface.

On that dull and dying afternoon daylight left him rapidly. He paused to open his control valve wider, to increase the air pressure inside his suit as the weight of the water over him increased. His suit, which had been rubbing against him, inflated at once. Plenty of pressure in that air tank.

Mark Quillan went on down the rope. Charley gave him slack grudgingly. As Mark went down his imagination, the existence of which he had denied, began to work. Not even the rush of the air through his helmet could dry the cold sweat that was forming on his brow.

It was always like that with Mark Quillan. He did not die a thousand deaths in anticipation, but he caught

hell on the job. Not till the water closed over his head and the light grew dim did he feel phantoms of fear rising in his brain and driving the courage out of his body.

"Lord!" he muttered. "I got 'em again!" His demons waited for him below, to possess him when he was at grips with a dangerous job. They took the strength out of his fingers when he needed the double strength necessary to do a job under the sea.

"What could ha' killed Dave and Jack like that?" he asked himself softly. He licked his lips. "I got to find out."

His lead-shod feet hit the iron deck of the barge with a clang. For an instant he cut his air to speak into the wet transmitter in his helmet.

"On the bottom," he reported gruffly. He waited tensely.

No answer came to him from Pedersen. The telephone was out.

He opened his air valve again and fiddled with the escape valve on the right side of his helmet. His fingers touched the light on his chest. Abruptly it set the black, bitter cold water ablaze with radiance. Though brilliant as an arc, the water killed the rays in a circle only a few feet in radius.

He made out the plates on the slanting deck at his feet, the end of the descending line made fast to a ring bolt, and, beyond a tangle of wire derrick stays, the square, black orifice that was the hatch. Into that cavern two good divers had gone. He stood there, staring at the vague, shadowy outline. Then he turned around and looked behind him. Nothing was there but a long wooden fender, bolt upright and caught by its stout lanyard in one of the loose wires on the deck, swaying uncertainly in the slack water.

He looked back toward the hatch. And even as he looked the lamp suddenly increased its brillance. Its rays became fiercely white—the white of extreme heat. Then they died in a tick of time. An after-image of the lamp burned for a moment in Mark Quillan's eyes. Then it, too, died and the blackness of deep water came down on him.

"Those damned lamps, always burning out!" he complained aloud.

HIS lines tightened abruptly on the breastplate as Charley Lind "oned" him.

"Are you all right?" that jerk demanded.

He answered it with a single affirmative pull and then pulled four times on the light wire to get rid of the useless lamp. It lifted suddenly out of his hand and vanished in the gloom above him.

He stared in the direction of that hatch, quite invisible now. Two men!

His fingers were twitching, as if fighting to seize his lines and signal the topside to get him out of there. Mustering his determination, he turned his escape valve to make himself a bit heavier. He took a step toward the hatch.

It was Mark Quillan against Mark Quillan again—the old fight, the fight he should have won long ago.

"You damned old nanny goat!" he told himself. His brain felt like a cage of swirling birds. It urged in whirlwind panic that there was no good reason to approach that hatch; that Dave and Jack were dead, past help; that he could stand here, near the descending line, take box after box of dynamite and shove it down that hatch. After that he could go up out of this trap, report the bodies gone and then they could fire the blast. If it didn't totally destroy the barge—well, doubtless it would destroy whatever it was that had sheared their lines in two. And then—more dynamite. Dynamite instead of himself . . .

"They're dead anyhow," he said.

Involuntarily he found himself twisting about, clutching protectingly at those precious lines, sewn together in the new way, that stretched up almost straight above him. Four swift jerks on that air hose and phone cable and he'd be on his way out of here. Only four jerks!

He could sense menace in the black water around him. He could feel it vibrating in his helmet. His legs seemed to be buckling under him. Swearing, he dropped to his knees and clutched at the slanting deck for support. Perhaps that funny feeling was just the trembling reverberations from the bell, vibrating the hollow buoy on which it was mounted, transmitting sound to water as well as to the air.

"Maybe it's just the chop of the rising sea, passing over," he muttered. "That's it, changing the air pressure in my ears all the time—or it could be that blasted bell. The tide's turning; maybe the bell sounds sort of different as the strain on the mooring chain lets up."

"Phony!" clamored his brain. "What's the sound of a bell got to do with the thing that killed two men down here? What killed them? What's going to happen to me?"

Mark Quillan got on to his feet again. Crouching, he groped his way onward—a step; two steps. He was passing over a few wire cables on the deck now—a mess from a fallen derrick or mast, no doubt. No need to warn Charley Lind to keep his lines tight; Charley was dealing out slack with reluctant hands, feeling his man, but not quite hampering his movements. Charley was shaky too.

One thrusting hand, pushed out ahead of him, suddenly touched something solid. It was the iron rim of the open hatch.

Mark Quillan's hand jerked away involuntarily. He dropped to his knees again, whispering to himself. Then he forced the hand out again. In another moment he had both hands on the hatchway. He drew himself toward it. His helmet must be projecting out over that square of unseen blackness now.

"You're going down in there, buddy," he told himself. "You ain't been afraid of the dark since they cut your hair short. An' it can't be darker than here. It can't—"

Warily he edged around the hatch, feeling stealthily. His fingers searched for jagged edges, for something that would explain the cutting of a hose. But the steel beam was uniformly straight and dull. In the starboard after corner he came upon a steel cable, stretching upward into the black water overhead. It was taut; he felt it vibrating in the current, as if set up too tight, but it was quite immovable in the corner of the hatch. Stretching down into the hold like that it could only be some sort of derrick fall, with a cargo hook secured below.

To avoid fouling his lines on the wire he crept back around the edge of the hatch, after side, port side, fore side, starboard side. He came to the wire in the corner again. There was no sharp steel anywhere around that hatch.

"Time to move on," he muttered.

Clearing his lines of the wire, he laid hold of it. Then, he slowly stood up on the edge of the hatch. He opened his escape valve to make himself a bit heavier. He shoved one foot out over the edge; then the other. He hung a moment, his teeth gritting. Hand under hand, he lowered himself down into the unseen hatch.

Charley "oned" him again as he swung on the wire. Mark continued to ease himself down. His leaden soles thudded on something. Scrap iron. He was on top of the cargo. He answered Charley with a reassuring jerk. Then he stood still, clutching the trembling wire cable.

Nothing happened. The air continued to gush into his helmet in its thrice divided course.

"Here we go!" he muttered, and turned forward in the hold. He had taken only one step when his forward foot brought up against something yielding and yet heavy. He dropped to his knees, quickly, and his cold hands touched the familiar fabric of a diver's suit. It was the body of Jack Austin or Dave Gore.

He was taking air fast now, so fast that he could feel it fouling in his helmet. His heart was thumping in his chest.

His hands darted up to his air hose.

above the metal ring where it was fastened to the breastplate. He felt the steady tension on the hose. That line was clear right up to Charley Lind.

He opened both air control and escape valves to increase the air flow without changing the distention of his suit. Then he laid hold of the dead man's suit. He found the shoulders and traced the arms down to the hands. They were ungloved, like his own, and were rigidly clutching the buckles of the lead-weighted belt, as if in the act of casting it off. His fingers felt the dead man's and found a second finger missing.

"Dave Gore!" he muttered. "He got this far—almost out o' here—and then—heart went, maybe. He had the guts—it must ha' been the heart. Too old."

Despite that unceasing rush of air Mark Quillan's forehead was cold and wet. Here was a fine reason, his brain urged, to get out of that hold; here was what he had come for—Dave Gore's body. He must get it to the descending line, signal, maybe go up with it.

Slowly he took his hands off the body. He touched his air hose; then he felt for his knife in the sheath on the belt. It was still there.

"If I ever get out o' here now I'll not come back," he warned himself, and turned forward again. "I got to get to that forward bulkhead—an' touch it! Then I'll have myself licked this time. I got to touch it!"

THE tide would be dragging hard in a few minutes. He stepped over Gore's body and started forward. There was small chance of his lines fouling on any piece of scrap; both Charley Lind and the increasing tide would keep too much tension on them for that.

He stepped on something—something that gave under his leaden boot, like a snake or an eel. But it did not squirm; it lay there quite still under his sole.

He bent and put out a hand. All the divers' yarns about the creatures of the deep, about the unguessed dangers, reeled through his mind. He touched the thing and knew at once what it was. A diver's hose. The cut end was in his fingers an instant later.

Whose hose? He pulled upon it. The tubing seemed to run almost directly forward. That meant that it was Austin's. He followed it slowly over the rough scrap, putting a strain upon it.

The hose inclined upward, toward the carlines and beams of the deck above. He reached up and touched a man's foot. It dangled from above. Austin's body, in his inflated suit, floated against the steel plates of the deck.

"Got scared, lost direction, tore off his boots and dropped off his belt in the dark—before he reached the hatch," Mark muttered. "With his line gone he couldn't—"

His hands leaped up to his own air hose. A quick, erratic movement of the tubing had been transmitted to him. It was no signal, no emphatic jerk. But the hose had vibrated. It stirred now in his hand. Something was happening to that air hose.

Swiftly he opened wide the control valve on the hose, just above his belt. He felt the air stream increase. Then, suddenly, the sound of hissing air ceased. The line was cut or ruptured.

"Gone!"

His hand was on the hose. There was still tension in the line. Although cut, it was not completely severed. Frantically he closed the escape valve on his helmet to treasure the air remaining in his suit. His heart was hammering at his chest, but he rigidly restrained his breathing. The safety valve just outside his helmet would prevent that small store of air from rushing back up the tubing; he must not waste a mouthful.

With hands feeling the direction in which the air hose led, he began to move. The water seemed to turn to a solid wall opposing him. Grimly he restrained a rising impulse to try to run, to beat himself against that wall. He walked, starving his lungs, all his power concentrated on backtracking through the darkness.

The slack he made was not taken up from the other end. Hand over hand, gently, he moved along the line of the hose over the rough pitfalls of the iron scrap. His nostrils were closing themselves. Suddenly the hose came free.

"Cut through!"

The telephone cable sewn to the hose went an instant later. Cable and hose drifted to the bottom.

Mark Quillan dropped to his knees. At a crawl, touching the lines gently, he followed their trend. Suddenly they ended. His chest seemed terribly hollow and aching; his heartbeat was erratic. He stretched out a hand farther and found the rounded copper of Dave Gore's helmet smooth against his fingers.

He had retreated as far as the master diver on that terrible return struggle. Waveringly he stood up. His hands groped this way and that in the darkness. Again he had to fight an impulse to tear off his belt; to fight his way upward, now that he was near that hatch. To float up he must free himself of leaden boots as well as belt, and that demanded time, effort, oxygen.

"More than I've got left!" The thought blazed in his mind.

Something lashed at his hand. Even through the numbness he could feel the sting of it. He groped toward it; felt the snap of it against his fingers again; then gripped it.

The thing was the wire cable—the derrick fall—on which he had swung down through the hatch. But now it had come alive—terribly alive! It was thrashing about in the water like the leather thong of a whip.

Grasping it, he could feel a grinding tremor as it flung itself taut against the steel edge of the hatch. Then, loose again, it slashed through the sea.

DIVERS who live long in their trade are quick of thought.

In the strong and terrible alternation of tension and looseness in that steel cable Mark Quillan read the secret of the barge that had cost two men their lives. And in the same instant he recognized a thin chance for himself.

He dropped to his knees near the whipping wire and let go the shoulder straps of his belt. It seemed to take him torturing, breathless years to accomplish that simple movement. But at last the belt dropped off him. He did not rise. Not light enough yet.

Air! Just a single gulp of air! With one breath of cool, fresh air he could conquer even the buckles of his boots. But there was no air, nothing but the numbing, foul gas he was drawing into his lungs with miserly caution.

Rigorously he forced his leaden limbs to action. He laid hold of the flogging cable with all his strength concentrated in his arms. Flung about by that thrashing wire, he lifted himself by it. He knew he lacked only a little buoyancy, but his body seemed as heavy as iron.

His helmet clanged suddenly against the beam of the hatch; then the thrashing wire pounded his fingers against the steel girder. Only an erratic slacking saved his mangled fingers.

Upward, he went, hand over hand. His body was battered as he lifted himself through the hatchway. His hands were opening and closing now in a rhythm that he dare not break. Once that ceased he would cease, too.

Suddenly one hand encountered a bent and snarled wire; the other touched the heavy links of a chain in which it was fouled. The hands went on up the chain with his body reeling limply behind. Right—left—right—left!

His brain was too deep in the agony of effort to hail the confirmation of his guess by the feel of the links of chain. Fleetingly he hoped old Pedersen would find out, too. Simple, really, though two men—or would it be three?—had died in that trap.

When the sinking barge, with foremast over the side, had fouled the bell-buoy, the wire of the dangling fall had snarled itself on the mooring chain of the buoy. And now that buoy was held

by the wire, anchored over the barge. And every six hours, as the tide ceased to run, the bell danced freely in slack water and the wire lashed and ground like a fury against the edge of the hatch.

Just during those very few minutes when the current ceased to run could a diver work in the hold. And his hose would lie across the path of that mad, slashing cable.

"Got to tell Pedersen!"

The idea seared his brain, spurred him on like the involuntary recoil from white-hot iron. The rhythm of his moving arms was broken; he finished his climb in a curst of wild, triumphant energy.

"Got to tell Pedersen!"

His helmet crashed against the barnacled bottom of the huge buoy. He let go his hold and pawed frantically, savagely upward, flailing the water. His suit scraped against the pounding cylinder, but he floundered on. His helmet shot up into a region of glaring light, clashing sound and plunging motion. On top!

Though on the surface, he was imprisoned in his suit. In a world of air he was suffocating. His lungs were burning up; his chest seemed to be caving in; his nostrils were closed; his mouth gaped wide, but drew in no breath.

His thrashing right hand clawed at the rocking bellbuoy; then the left hand grasped one of the standards supporting the bell. He drew himself toward the bell. Heedless of all else, he battered his helmet against the steel support—battered it with all his waning might.

The gunmetal grid over his face-plate bent; the thick glass shattered suddenly upon that smashing impact.

Glass flew in his face, gashing him. But he heeded not. He was gulping air —air! Clutching the leaping buoy, he drank deep of biting, reviving air.

Vaguely he was aware that men were shouting and running on the deck of the *Favor*. They put over a boat that leaped jerkily over the sharp, cresting seas rolled up by the northeaster.

FIVE tides later, when Mark Quillan had shoved the last box of dynamite, the one with the fulminate of mercury detonator nestling among the sticks, into place in the hull of the barge, he came up to the surface, was hauled over the side, and sat down heavily on his stool.

"All set," he said when his helmet was off. "Five tons—two hundred boxes—and not any of 'em more than five feet apart, with a few fuses along the line to make sure."

The lighthouse tender which had removed the bellbuoy was standing by out in the Sound. The *Favor* got under way, with the thin copper wires reeling out freely astern of her. The crew gathered by the after bitts to watch.

Nels Pederson crouched near the battery box, fingering the plunger.

"You figure you'd like to send that barge to splinters yourself?" he asked generously. "I wish the damn bell was there with it."

Mark Quillan did not hear him. He was looking placidly astern, his jaws going steadily on his wad of gum.

"Mark, you want to fire this blast yourself?" Pedersen asked again.

"What for?" replied the diver. "Step on it; that isn't my job."

Pedersen looked hard at him.

"You don't understand," he said. "That terrible bell. That mantrap—that damn barge! Ah, you don't know what a sensitive man like me suffers."

Mark Quillan grinned briefly.

"Sure I don't," he agreed with stolid lack of emphasis. "That bells sounds just like a bellbuoy to me. Get going with the fireworks."

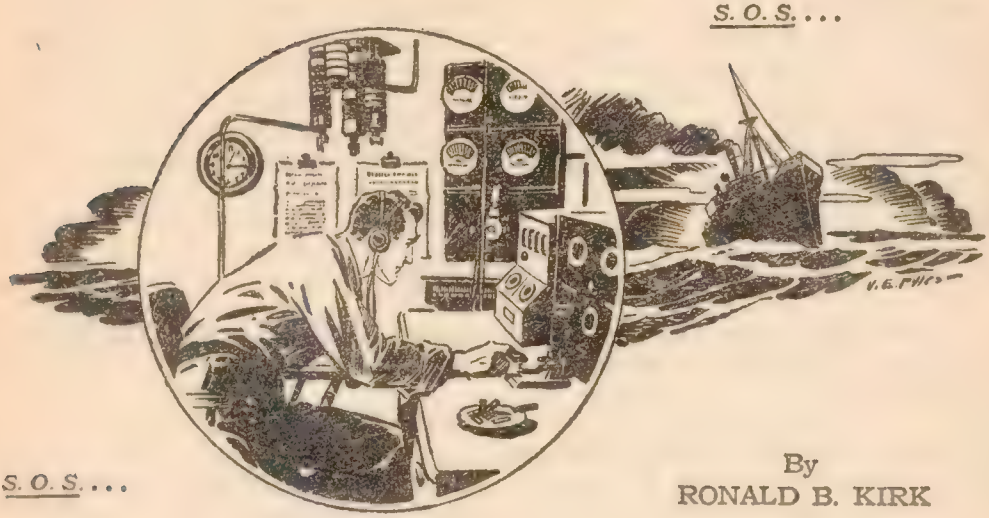
Pedersen leaned over the battery box.

A mountain of water leaped into frothy, tumultous being. For an instant it roared skyward with thunderous, terrible violence.

Mark Quillan did not blink at that stupendous explosion. He chewed his gum without missing a beat of his jaws.

"That time," he told himself, "I got by."

Farm For Sale



By
RONALD B. KIRK

THE AIR had been quiet for an hour. Only the routine traffic of a blatant commercial broadcast interrupted the stillness. We were two days out of New York. The ship ploughed steadily through heavy seas. She had a roll that made me drowsy.

The second engineer looked in and hit me behind the ear with a wad of paper. I thumbed my nose at his broad back and readjusted my phones.

S O S Sealer Esquimau Maid *Sinking 46° 22″ north latitude 42° 56″ west longitude*

Lucky for me the second had gone on watch just then! I looked at the chart. It was close enough on a map. But we were sailing the seas, not a map.

S O S Sealer Esquimau Maid *Sinking 46° 22″ north—*

The call came in loud and clear, steady as a rock. That operator was an old timer. He might have been whistling to his girl. I spoke to the Old Man on the bridge.

"Verify it," he ordered curtly.

When I went to work, everything else had signed off, even the dance music from the Windsor.

Repeat position How long can you stay afloat Fuller S S President Lincoln

46° 22″ north latitude 42° 56″ west longitude Less than thirty minutes Bow smashed Lifeboats splintered on ice

By that time the Old Man was at my elbow, reading as fast as I transcribed. He dictated my next message, our exact position and probable speed. The old timer at the key in the shack of the sinking sealer must have known immediately that we could not reach them in time. We knew it, unless they could stay afloat for at least an hour. But he never hesitated in his reply.

Bring me a match Mine are wet

I was just a kid. But I knew the traditions of the service. I pictured him

crouching at his key, the decks awash, his feet in sea water, and that craft tilted crazily against the charging seas. Pulling on a dead pipe.

The Old Man stood by impassively, but I was breathless. He spoke to the engineroom sharply. I could not think of anything to say. Perhaps the operator at the other key expected a reply, for he stood by for twelve minutes.

Then, suddenly:

Mother may I go out to swim—

In spite of everything, I laughed. The Old Man frowned, but said nothing. Finally he turned away, going to the bridge. The man at the key was quiet. I wanted to pin a D.S.C. on his wet shirt. But I could not even answer him for pity. God, why couldn't we ride the wind to reach them? Was nobody closer to them than this? As if in answer to my thought, a message came through.

We're depending on you No one else is even close

The Old Man spoke to me from the bridge. I turned to my key.

Making twenty-three knots If the skies fall on you our boilers have blown up

All I can hear are seas and wind Skipper tells me they are trying to knock together a raft But it's impossible to keep a footing on deck

How many aboard

Twenty-two counting the cook's cockroach

There fell a silence. I could hear faintly the dit-da of an Australian on the other side of the world. His C Q spluttered against the background of my thoughts. Probably the operator on the sealer heard him, too. His silence loosed my imagination. Had his batteries been flooded? Was he swimming around the cabin, trapped by a sudden surge of the tumultuous seas? Or had the ship gone down? Frightened, I tried to call him in. But only the echo of the Australian's C Q answered me. I spoke to the Old Man. With his curt, "Stand by," there came down to me the whistle of the wind. The ship shivered under the drive of the engines.

Suddenly out of the night he spoke again. I felt the quick relief of a reprieve.

Heigh ho President Lincoln *How's Old Abe*

What happened

A seventh sea turned us over A couple of batteries and the carpenter gone to Davy Jones Do you hear me O K

About R3 But we must be getting close

NEVER a word of those frantic moments trying to keep alive, trying to get his transmitter working again amid the stinging seas and darkness.

Start your siren It will brace the boys if they hear it

He had to repeat the last sentence twice. For a moment his signal had faded out completely. I cursed the seas and the pounding engines. But, enemy and friend, they were both thrashing their best. That man was sitting alone with death. I wanted to talk to him. There is something written on the heart of a man who can whistle in the teeth of doom.

Damn dark in this hole

Was he lonely? Was he scared? Did he remember good days and girls and warm beds? I wanted to talk to him.

But something baffled me between my fingers and the impersonal key. A radio operator learns the art of listening. He hears the unheard sounds between the sounds. Listening—listening—I seemed to hear a shadow's footfall, the old foe, advancing across that slanting deck.

"How is she weathering it?" asked the Old Man, his voice vibrant like the storm.

"Still afloat, sir."

"It won't be long now. We should be alongside her in the next five minutes. Can she hear our siren?"

"I'll see, sir." But as I put my finger to the key, the other operator broke in. He was worried by my silence. I could sense the intensity of his cry. The signals were like a shout across the dark.

C Q C Q Are you there Abe Lincoln

Then he heard my answer. There was a moment's silence, but he felt the need to keep talking.

I'd give ten years' pay for a smoke

Can you hear our siren

I could almost see him straining to catch the sound.

Yes by God Heigh ho She nearly dropped from under me in that last wash

Ride her cowboy

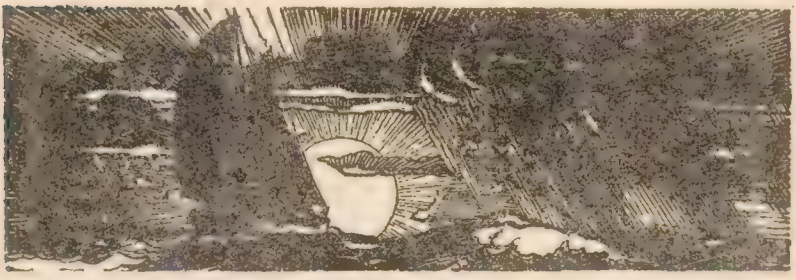
There was an unintelligible dit-da-da, then silence, then—

Do you know anyone who has a farm for sale No more going to sea for—

No, there would be no more going to sea for him. He had made his last voyage. His time was up. His work was done. There is a saying of the sea: No need to bury a sailor.

Good fishing—

—I tapped out after a heavy silence. But I cannot know where he was when he heard it.



By CAPTAIN FREDERICK MOORE

A Tale of Malaysia and Headhunters' Gold

SMOKED HEADS

McLAW, who was ahead of Bannister and me, heard it. Hanf, who was behind us, stopped in his tracks—we did not hear his feet swish through the sand as we listened.

It was exactly like the sound of a cork coming with unexpected abruptness from a bottle. That jungle on the seashore near the mouth of the Wawa River was an unhealthy place for the sound of pulled corks. The surf was not far away, but our ears were accustomed to the dull roar of the beach wash. We had camped close to the water that first night out from Jim Sing's, knowing that the sea tribes close at hand in the mangroves of the river's mouth would be protection. We had come up from Thursday Island and were on our way to New Guinea.

The jungle edge appeared to be a solid wall of leaves, vines and blossoms. The sound had come from behind that verdant wall. At first I thought Bannister was hit, for he snapped his revolver from his leg holster. I was wearing my sun helmet low on the back of my neck. The needle arrow from a blowgun—for such the sound indicated—had been loosed behind us.

Bannister, who was three steps ahead of me, swung on his heel as he drew. The tough old miner had learned his guns in the American Southwest, and he was generally in action before you could see him draw.

It is necessary to act swiftly in the Mawa River country. I swung to look back too. My gun was bearing in the same direction as Bannister's. We were both looking back before the sound of the blowgun was out of our ears.

Hanf, the fat German trader, did not make any cry. We saw his body stiffen upward as if he had been stung by a bee. We supposed that the sound had startled him. We expected him to run for the beach, for he knew enough about the natives to get away from a blowgun. But he neither ran from the jungle nor drew one of his pet automatics. I glanced over my shoulder and saw Mc-

Law turned toward us, a pistol in each hand.

Hanf misled us by failing to let us know what happened. But McLaw, Bannister and myself failed to act according to plan, for it had been agreed that we should all run at the sound of a *sumpitan*. You can't fight blowguns fired from leaves so thick that you can't see anything. You can pour lead into the green wall, but to no profit. As a native lets go his arrow—only the size of a needle—he is either behind a tree or he drops behind solid cover.

"Where was it, Hanf?" McLaw asked.

Hanf did not answer. He lifted a fat arm and thrust his mushroom helmet to the back of his head. Next he took off his glasses, slowly and thoughtfully, turning his head as he unhooked them from over his ears. He looked down at his boots, and then we heard him muttering. As he had been trading some twenty years in that group of islands, he was not scared much by headhunters and their blowguns.

If there was one native in that jungle with a blowgun there probably were twenty. They went in gangs at that season of the year, when the young bloods of the hills needed heads to get wives. So they hunted together. They like white heads, which do not shrink so much when smoked and take a better color; and the hill girls like to see their young men come home with white men's heads.

We supposed that Hanf was swearing in German, which is sometimes a considerable ceremony. Then our attention was drawn from the trader by the sound of another cork being pulled. This time it was beyond McLaw, behind him. Bannister and I turned to see McLaw swing away from us. He must have squeezed his triggers as he turned. The empty shells shucked away from him like corn out of a shelling machine.

"Der shvine!" said Hanf.

Bannister said, "Dutch ain't hit!" Bannister could think of two things at the same time—the fact that Hanf was not hit by an arrow from the first blowgun we heard; and where his first bullet should go.

"He'll be getting mad next," I replied.

I think that McLaw was still firing as Bannister and I spoke. McLaw's knees were limp to take up the shock of recoil. He wore around his sun helmet what might be called a veil. It fell all the way to his shoulders, with rims of brown cloth at top and bottom and copper screening between. It was really a head net for use against mosquitos on the river at night, with a hole in front for his pipe. He had cut slits for his eyes above the pipe hole.

Bannister and I could see the back of the mosquito net. There was a tiny spot on it, probably half the size of a dime. We knew it was a pith disk, the butt of a needle arrow. The pith disk is the wadding which carries the needle along the bore of the bamboo blowgun. The end of the needle, or thorn, is covered with poison. It takes only a little poison in the hole made by the needle to kill a man. McLaw's net had saved him from getting the tiny projectile in the back of his neck.

While McLaw was firing we heard a scream in the brush. It was close at hand. Then came a rustling of the leaves. We heard the echoes of McLaw's stream of shots rolling back from the hills. Next we caught the distant throbbing of a drum away back in the purple haze up the Mawa, where no white man had ever gone on any journey except his own funeral.

About a dozen men a year went up the Mawa. They all had one-way tickets. They only increased the number of weddings and added to the collection of heads in the hillmen's headhouses, which advertised how good they were at getting white men.

JIM SING, who ran the hotel at the little trading station, like all Chinese, took his time. He let the gold come to him, and got more than he admitted. It was

Hanf who was able to estimate how rich Jim Sing was getting. Jim Sing bought from Hanf about two thousand tin hatchets a year, and swapped them for gold. He said he made only a fair profit. Only about two hundred dollars' worth of gold for a twenty-cent hatchet.

The hillmen came down through the jungle over the passes with gold nuggets. They left the gold in fiber baskets on a stump and disappeared. Jim went out and left two tin hatchets on the stump. The natives would trade that way only with Jim.

Hanf had tried for several years to get in on the secret trading with the headhunters. He never had any success. He built up a system of watching, using high-powered field glasses by days, and hiding in a tree at night. He told us that about once a week Jim Sing got his twenty ounces of gold for two hatchets. Two hundred dollars in gold for a German trade hatchet made it possible for Jim Sing to run his hotel at a loss. That was why Hanf was so willing to go up the Mawa River with us. And he liked the scientific way we had planned things.

McLaw did not remark, "I've got him." Nobody spoke, except Hanf, and he seemed to be talking to himself in a low tone. We saw McLaw snap new magazines into his automatics, his eyes straight ahead, the needle arrow still sticking in the back of his net.

Bannister and I watched the jungle. We could hear in there what resembled the slow movements of snakes. Natives move through thick jungles with considerable speed and scarcely any sound whatever.

Bannister and I were annoyed by Hanf then. He knew better than to move unless it was to run from the jungle. Yet we could hear his feet swishing through the dry sand. We waited for him to come up to us, thinking about it in another compartment of our brains. We did not look at him at first, as we were intent on locating the muzzle of a bamboo gun in the thick leaves. Ten feet behind a muzzle there would be a native.

"You've got to do close figuring," Bannister had said to me the night before, "if you want to allow for where the man is behind what you see. If you're wrong, he gets you; but if you're right he gets a new belly-button."

Maybe that is not a pleasant thought for people at home with their slippers on, worrying about what white men do to natives on distant and beautiful tropical islands. We happened to be worrying just then about what natives can do to white men on beautiful tropical islands while the sun was shining hot on the dry sand and there was a ruffle of white lace along the shingle where the surf froth washed the coral dust.

About five more drums were going now. They were probably five miles apart. The message that white men were in action was evidently running along the upper reaches of the river where we intended to go. A stranger on the Mawa might not know what those drums were, even if he happened to be able to hear them at all. It is necessary to recognize that low vibration when it comes from a great distance. It suggests a man shingling a house a hundred miles away. It is a big and empty house, say, and his hammer is made of bell metal. Low thunder, barely heard, would be another way of describing distant hill drums, dulled by the blanket of vine-topped jungles. Those drums seem to be heard not with your ears so much as with the bones in your head. There have been many remarks on the subject.

"Too many bones in the head helps you to hear the drums better," Bannister liked to say, "but in that case you never hear 'em but once, and know what they be. But your head goes right on listening at 'em, even if your ears are shriveled up and swing in the breeze playing through one of them headhouses."

Bannister was a great hand at making pictures with words.

MANY drums were going, as noted, when I looked back to see where Hanf was walking and why he came no closer to us. When I saw him I knew what had happened.

Hanf appeared to be waltzing over the sand. He held both hands out in an effort to keep his balance. His mushroom helmet was upside down nearby. He made several dizzy turns, stepped into his helmet, stumbled and fell, struggled to his feet, and continued his mad dance. All the time he was talking to himself in a low tone. The first *sumpitan* discharge we heard had delivered a needle into his fat neck. The poison was working in his blood.

Bannister, out of the tail of his eye, saw me move to go back to Hanf. McLaw must have looked back just then. I heard his voice, low and calm as if he might be asking me for a match—

"Hanf is hit; help him to the water."

"I'll go," I said to Bannister.

"I'll cover you," he answered.

Hanf fell again as I got to him. He was unable to move for several minutes. His big blue eyes, without his glasses, looked up at me against the brightness of the sky. The sun did not make him blink. His quivering lips tried to smile. He kept on muttering. He knew that I wanted him to get to the surf. A man dies more pleasantly in the water.

I put a half pint bottle of Jim Sing's trade gin, supplied by Hanf to the Chinese, between the trader's teeth. He weighed all of two hundred pounds, which made it out of the question for me to carry him, especially when he was having intermittent fits of paralysis.

Hanf got to his feet when I pulled on both hands. He tried to reach his sun helmet. It did not seem necessary just then, but Hanf, in a moment of ability to speak, said—

"I vant to die all dressed up goot." He was always formally polite, bowing and clicking his heels at any excuse.

I felt that he ought to have what he wanted, even if it seemed silly. He had no illusions about the brand of poison served on the Mawa.

Dumping the sand from his orange-lined helmet I clapped it on his swaying head. The orange silk was also part of Hanf's personality. He would not wear a helmet without orange silk inside the crown.

As I started him toward the beach, steering him along, he was breathing hard and making a difficult job of staying alive. He tried to smile; he had once said that it was every man's duty to die smiling. He believed it made it easier for those who happened to be present at the ceremony. Not a bad idea.

I found the arrow behind his left ear. He had not bothered to pull it out. When I asked him why he left it there he said in a whisper—

"I breferred not to trouble you other ones."

The blue of a growing patch of discoloration had already spread over the back of his fat neck.

"Why did you take your glasses off?" I asked.

This was my way of keeping his mind off his agony. A man does not die prettily after a *sumpitan* arrow and he needs to think of something else while he is at the job.

"I neffer can bray my glasses mit," he gurgled. Then, with a special effort, he swung his blue eyes on me and grinned. He wanted to make sure I caught the joke that was coming. "Ven I die—I alvays—my glasses—take off."

He broke away from me then, not being able to control his leg muscles, and began to waltz. I captured him again and got him to the water. He stumbled to his knees, and I held him while he prayed in German.

He was smiling as he died.

The drums were getting stronger. It was my job now to stand by Hanf and make sure the headhunters did not rush for his head. The sight of a dead white man sometimes destroyed their innate caution.

There were new and strange sounds coming from the nearby jungle now. It was something like a woman pounding wet clothes with a club. We knew what it was. Our headhunters would be leaving the vicinity. The drums were calling them in. The sounds we heard were blows with a blade. Those natives of the Mawa did not waste heads. The man getting the head of McLaw's dead native was probably not from the same hill village, and one head is as good as another for a marriage license.

McLaw fired twice, but high. He did not want to kill the hacker, simply wanted the job hurried. We waited twenty minutes, but we heard nothing more.

McLAW went to the place near the jungle where he knew they lay what was left of his native. Moving slowly, both guns ready, he listened. High up in the hills we heard the gang on their way. They made no attempt to move without noise now. They were in a hurry. Perhaps twenty or thirty of them. They had probably been out all night, through most of the dark hours, lurking around our camp when we left the prau which had brought us from Jim Sing's.

That boat we left with the sea tribes in the mangrove swamp where they had a village at the river's mouth. And in it we left all the special gear we intended to use on the upriver trip in a dugout. We camped on the sand, close to the water, with a line of burning driftwood between us and the jungle and a moon that would help in case we had to do any shooting. Besides, we left two of the sea tribe on watch—and they had a special liking for getting hillmen.

As we waited there to see what McLaw would find we saw the prau come from the cover of the mangroves with the six of its crew. This sea tribe was originally a hill tribe. They really belonged up in the deep and distant valleys where the Mawa had its beginnings. But something like a couple of centuries ago the headhunters had driven them back to the coast and forced them to get a living from the sea. The headhunters did not belong on the island at all, but were invaders from the southern islands of the group.

The gold we were going after in the hills really belonged to the sea tribes. During the invasion so many were killed that the sea tribes still remembered it. It is not likely to be credited, but savages have long memories. Having no written history in their language, they bind their old stories of wars in brown skin on the Mawa, meaning that they dance out in nakedness the legend of their defeat by the headhunters. These people take their ancient history seriously.

The sea tribes are eager to have the white man go up the Mawa and drive out the hillmen, so the old homes may be recovered, and the villages in the mangrove swamps at the mouth of the river abandoned. Themselves headhunters, since having been driven down to the coasts, they no longer take white heads. They need white friends on the beach. Afraid of getting too civilized, they keep their hands in by collecting crocodile heads—and a hillman's when they can get it.

Our six with the prau helped Bannister and me to put Hanf's body into the boat. Then we went back to McLaw to see what he had. His prize was a slim brown youngster, wearing only a breechcloth and a bark vest. There was a grass bag made fast to his shoulders. His head was missing, but the lower jaw was left, as was customary.

The *sumpitan* was missing, but a braided quiver full of poisoned arrows was attached to the breechcloth. Our long-haired, almost naked crew took the arrows, which were thorns with the pith bores carefully fastened to them.

We dumped the grass bag on the clean sand. There were about twenty ounces of small nuggets, which looked

like the drippings of a kettle which had boiled over while yellow lead was being melted. They were irregular in shape, polished by the action of swift water along the sandy banks of the hills.

The youngster had apparently started for Jim Sing's for a hatchet trade, had fallen in with the head party and gone along with them, hoping to return home with two tin hatchets and a head.

Bannister swore a little as he handled the nuggets.

"That river up in the hills is just a natural sluiceway," he remarked. "I'd say that the small nuggets are picked up because they are handy and light, and the big ones left on the shore."

"We'll get the big ones," said McLaw.

"Sure! Some nice fat ones for bankers to play with," said Bannister.

"If we can only get home before they abolish gold," said McLaw, "we can make the trip pay."

"Anyhow, we'll abolish work," said Bannister.

THE prau contained our excellent equipment. We had two submachine guns, which looked like heavy rifles. They could rip a horizontal slice across a landscape, leaving no holes in the atmosphere for a man to dodge into. Bannister felt we could get along fine with such rifles in the blowgun country. We also had a powerful outboard motor. Hanf had come along with us because he felt that our modern equipment gave us an even break with the blowguns. Hanf had simply made a mistake. In the Mawa country you make only one mistake.

The prau took us across the river, and the dugout we were waiting for came out of the mangroves. We then had to load our gear into the dugout and improve it for the outboard engine with stuff we brought for the job from Jim Sing's little port.

"While we're busy," Bannister said to McLaw, "you use all the education you got on the sea tribes and find out how big that village is—the first one—we'll hit. Hanf said he knew—about a hundred families. But the drums may bring in a lot of suburban population. We'll send the prau back to Jim Sing's with Hanf's body. That'll keep any of the hangers-on around the hotel from following us. We'll send a note to Jim that we're resting up after the shock—and make that first village about dark."

"We're likely to have a busy night," said McLaw.

"If there are about a thousand fighting men at our first village, we ought to be finished a little before midnight. We want to get past that village. Hanf said, estimating by the time it takes to come through the passes, that the gold comes from above the first village—but he was a bad estimator." Bannister was sorry to lose the trader.

"We'll be watched all the way up," said McLaw.

McLaw started away from us. He had a bracket to be bolted to the overhanging stern of the dugout. I was boring the holes for the bolts.

"While you're using that Edinburgh education of yours," Bannister called after McLaw, "find out if we'll hit any rapids. We've got to think of all such things. I owe Jim Sing two dollars, and I'd hate to have him lose it."

McLaw made a face at him. The Scotsman had learned the language of the sea tribes in a college in Edinburgh, and in order to speak it he had come to the Mawa country; otherwise he'd have wasted his time. Now it looked as if what he learned could be made to pay. And it takes a Scotsman to make education show a profit.

Presently we could hear McLaw palavering in the mangroves. There was a town in there, but nobody would suspect it. All we could see were a couple of hornbill birds messing around with some berries that grew on a vine high up in the trees. The population behind the mangroves came in and went out by secret canals, the whole place being arranged to prevent the hillmen from

sneaking in at night. The headhunters in the mountains did not use boats at all. They were too smart to go boating about as amateurs, knowing that the sea tribes could put them out of business on the water.

We had an extra set of paddles. As I was to run the motor, in case we had engine trouble, we would want to get to cover before looking things over. We were taking no sea tribesmen with us, partly because we did not want to bother with them, but largely for the reason that the hillmen would be less inclined to attack us if we were alone. We still had a lot to learn.

McLaw returned with the information that there were no rapids within fifty miles. He knew his mileage might be off.

"They figure distances by how far six paddlers can go in the dark, and that varies by the speed of the river at various seasons. Besides, they're awful liars, not because they want to mislead, but because they're so eager to answer all questions."

I tightened the last bolt of the frame and set about putting in the stanchion sockets along the gunwale, which would support on both sides of the dugout a heavy wire screen such as is used at home to keep cats out of cellars. That would stop spears from the shore.

"If I don't get back," said Bannister, "I'll have a free funeral. If this old bean of mine can't outthink and outshoot these pop-gunners, it ought to be hung up to dry."

McLaw helped fit the stanchion bases, put in the poles and staple the wire screening. We felt fairly safe when we looked at our armored boat, with power hanging at the stern and the machine rifles laid out handy.

WE GOT started about noon. We buzzed up the river at about five miles an hour, not wanting to excite the populace with too much speed. The sea tribes saw us off from the mangroves, but only a few of the old men came near while we started up the engine. It scared them, and they got back into the mangroves.

When we got out of sight we made fifteen miles. That is fast traveling on the Mawa, considering the down current. The dugout was long and narrow, thin and light, and it easily carried our ammunition and plenty of grub.

We saw nothing but nipas and jungles along the banks, and now and then a crocodile slick in the mud of the banks. McLaw was in the bow with his machine rifle; Bannister was amidships, sitting in the bottom of the boat with his rifle muzzle resting on his feet; while I was in the stern with a motor that ran like something hooked into a power plant back home.

We heard calls along the banks which might have been parrots. We knew better. That was our audience. They probably took us for a monster dragon fly with white men as passengers. Before long the drums began to talk high up in the valley, but slowly, as if new drum words had to be invented to tell about us. By three o'clock the mountain ranges were humming. But we heard them only when the motor was shut off.

There were bends in the Mawa that had to be taken with caution. There were rafts of grass and weeds and bits of vines coming down, and in narrow places at the turns we got in among them. Our propeller was fouled a couple of times during the afternoon. The current gradually grew swifter, and we kept in the center of the river where it was strongest. Once we were swept downstream a mile or so by big patches of vegetation. They were like windrows of hay athwart the river, and they could not be broken or cut through. We were afraid that the natives would learn how easily we could be stopped, so when we saw something coming that looked as if it would stop us by force, we went in toward the shore and pretended to be busy looking over the banks.

When we got to higher banks, where the sand was exposed by the low state of the river, Bannister went ashore and examined the ground. He found several small nuggets, none bigger than a pea. But the gold was not thick enough to suit him.

"The river don't cut deep enough here," he said as he came back aboard. "What we want is higher banks. Good rocky bottom and gorge stream. Good picking here, but we're after bigger stuff."

Later on, as the river narrowed, we got a shower of bamboo spears. Our screen sides made us look like a porcupine after that volley. When we hit a wide reach we got into the middle of it and picked out some of the spears that stuck in the wire.

We didn't shoot back. There was nothing to be gained by killing natives we couldn't see. Our ammunition would be handier for something like a real fight. Perhaps we made a mistake not to show those natives early in the day what we had.

It was just before dark when we came abruptly upon a clearing on the right bank of the river. The jungle opened to us so suddenly that we could not approach with caution. We expected that before we came to the first village we should see something along the banks which would warn us. We had forgotten that the village knew every inch of our progress. There was not a soul in sight.

There were two buildings well in from the river—narrow, high-gabled buildings of bamboo and thatch with ornate eaves carved fancifully. These we knew to be headhouses. The hillmen lived in trees, so there was nothing in the nature of streets or huts. There were hedges against the jungle edge of the clearing, and among them we could make out the bamboo palisades of the protecting city wall. Poles against trees revealed the tree houses if you looked sharply. We heard a dog yelp back in the brush, and we saw thin smudges of smoke from the homes in the more distant trees.

There was no way of estimating how many natives lived in those trees. It was possible that the women and children had pushed back into the hills, or at least a little deeper into the jungles than the bamboo walls skirted by the hedges. Such villages, approached from landward, usually have concealed paths, or rather mazes of paths, and the stranger may easily run into spear traps, the weapons made fast to tied saplings, and pointed with poison.

"What we ought to do," said Bannister, as he regarded the jungle edge of the clearing, "is to land and burn the headhouses."

"We might stay longer than we expect," opined McLaw.

"We could sweep a path through a thousand of these warriors," retorted Bannister. "But it looks as if everybody has gone to church, so we'll get past without too much trouble." He kept the muzzle of his rifle handily over the top of the topedo netting rising from the gunwale to starboard.

"They don't want any row with us," was my own opinion.

I gave the engine all it would take, and we buzzed past the deserted village.

THE river narrowed sharply as we went on. The valley became more of a gorge. The compass revealed that we were running in the same general line as the coast we had left, showing that we were not penetrating the island deeper, but were southing. It grew dark rapidly between the twin ranges.

We made sure that our flashlights would be close at hand. Running slowly, but without showing any light, we barely avoided rocks. When the gloom thickened we did not dare go any farther. But there was a bend ahead, and we hoped to get beyond that before shutting off.

"This gorge cuts a gold mine in two," said Bannister in a loud whisper. "The nuggets are washed out of pockets by the high water of the floods. Half the sand up here, I'd say, is gold dust. We can pick up enough in a couple of days to pay well, and then get out. Then we'll come up again. In a few months we'll have these babies used to seeing us pole around. And when we get back with a load of gold we'll tell Jim Sing we found nothing. We don't want this river crowded with white men."

"We'll ruin Jim Sing's trade in hatchets," said McLaw.

"Jim Sing has kept the lid on long enough," said Bannister. "I'm not so sure that the chink wants us to get back alive. Been my idea that the chink sends word up ahead of prospectors to get 'em. He's thicker with the natives than Hanf dreamed."

I slowed a little to get past the bend. I was really steering now by a thin line of stars overhead, showing between the peaks, but they marked the channel to some degree. Both banks were close now, and high, not more than a hundred feet apart. I could see the stars from the middle of the stream. Before we had gone five hundred yards beyond the last bend, another shut the river off like a wall. I wanted to run up to it, but throttled down to reduce the racket.

We made out creepers that crossed the river, seeing only a filmy network against the strip of sky, the lower part being in velvety darkness. We were almost under it before we knew it was a bamboo hanging bridge, slung on rattans. I threw on more power, knowing that we should get out of there with all speed. That bridge mean't there was another village close at hand.

Under the bridge the dugout's stem struck something. The obstruction was soft and unyielding, as if it were a basket-like raft or a fish trap. It gave under pressure, and we heard a grating sound along the bottom of the boat. It seemed for a minute that we would get over, and I swung more power into the propeller. But we seemed to bounce back after each give of the raft, and I shut off.

"The river'll take us clear," said McLaw. He got a paddle out and, leaning over the bit of decking forward, began to thrust into the river to push us free.

There was a show of moonlight on the high peaks to our right. I saw that the bridge overhead was far more than a few vines with crosspieces tied from doubled vines. It looked fairly solid, as if floored with bamboo poles set close together. It threw a heavy shadow down upon us, and made a bar of black across the river out from the banks where the water was star-shot.

McLaw's paddle did not free us. We believed that we had run upon a mud-bank covered with reeds or young bamboo. We rolled a little, a motion which I believed to be due to McLaw's pushing with the paddle. We swung slightly with the current, as the force of the stream was pressing us over and bringing us broadside. My suspicion that we were on soft mud seemed to be borne out by the fact that we were higher out of the water than when fully afloat.

Bannister got out a bamboo pole we carried to make soundings. I could not see him in the dark, but I heard the pole grate along the inner side as he drew it from under the gunwale. He gave a gasp of astonishment.

"We ain't on a bank! We're in deep water!" he said a second later. Then the current swept the pole away.

The bracket which held the outboard motor was straining, the bolts drawing through wood. The motor shot up from the frame in spite of my efforts to keep the steering arm down. The stern of the boat seemed to be stuck.

"Shoot a light forward here!" said McLaw. "We're fouled in what seems to be an old picket fence."

Bannister's flashlight hit the water ahead, so McLaw could see what he was probing at. The three of us were puzzled by what we saw. We seemed to have run afoul of the framing of an old floor of a native house, or the roof of a house

that had been built on a raft. Heavy vines, formed into a lacework with squares at least two feet across, were just ahead of the bows. The edge of this gigantic matting was rising and curling back on us.

"It's part of that blasted bridge over us," said Bannister. "It carried away in a gale of wind and the lazy tripes never bothered to get it up. Back your engine and let's get out of here."

We saw that the crude matting was lifting astern, too, as if coming against the stream. It was that twisting upward at the boat's ends of the heavy vines which was breaking our motor bracket and lifting the motor up out of place.

Then we made an important discovery in connection with that matting. It was lifting at the sides too! Vines trailing down from the bridge—vines as thick as a man's wrist—were being hauled up to the bridge. They were all around us, fast to the edges of what was a great cargo net.

"Hell!" said Bannister. "We've run into an elevator!"

He shot the light overhead. We saw the bridge, some six feet wide, swinging. It seemed to have solid flooring. Such bridges are generally nothing but four lines, fastened together with a few vines, and natives do a tightrope walk to get across. But this bridge seemed to have a plank footpath. It sagged down to within twenty feet of us there in the center.

"Drop that paddle and get your rifle!" cried Bannister to McLaw.

He shut off his light and I heard him fumbling for his own machine-rifle. The motor bracket was breaking, but worst of all the boat itself was cracking in the middle, being only a thin shell, heavily loaded, and lifted at bows and stern.

"That bridge's solid with natives!" cried Bannister. "Shoot straight up—everybody!" I heard his safety catch snap, and at that instant we capsized. The outboard dropped out of its bracket as I spilled out of the boat.

WE ALL expected to be in the river. But we went sprawling into the big net, a couple of feet above the water. One of my legs went through, and an arm, and as I was trying to untangle myself I heard Bannister swearing in a quiet monotone. It was not blasphemy in the ordinary sense, nor did it have fear in it. He was finding fault with himself for not knowing from the first that we had been trapped and were being hauled up to the bridge. He began pulling our wire screening out from the gunwale on the starboard side, stanchions and all coming away.

Time stopped again. We could hear water dripping. We felt the upward surges of the net which was lifting us, boat and all. Bannister must have put his flashlight in a pocket when he reached for a gun before we rolled over on the net which held the boat. A beam of light sprayed over the bottom of the dugout.

I saw McLaw face down in a mess of gear, both arms reaching out wildly.

"A hatchet! Get a hatchet!"

"Give 'em lead!" said Bannister.

His light went out and then the muzzle of his rifle, pointed upward, turned into a skyrocket. Flame poured from that muzzle up toward the stars, the bullets first passing through the bridge. It was floored with natives—a solid mass of brown flesh—and they were all tugging on the vines that were lifting us.

As Bannister's gun emptied the air was full of falling bodies, and that gorge was torn by screams. We were splashed by water as the river caught the dead and wounded. They struck the boat, they bounced from the net hung above the water containing us and the boat, they gurgled and shrieked in the river close at hand, and were swept downstream from us and silenced under the surface.

Bannister's light came on for an instant. Spears showered downward on us, a rain of poisoned points falling ver-

tically like elongated drops of liquid. McLaw's white shirt, as he fumbled about for a hatchet or a gun, became a pin cushion before my eyes. I heard the grunts of the spear-throwers overhead. Then we struck the water. I knew I had been saved from spears by the wire mesh Bannister had pulled from the boat's stanchions while I was on the net of vines. I was fighting to get clear of the wire and up from the net as I lay on my back in the river, partly supported by the bamboo framework under me, and I remember seeing what appeared to be a great hole in the bridge overhead and the stars through it. Bannister's bullets had made that hole through bodies packed solidly enough to form a human flooring.

The dugout righted itself, having been freed of much of our gear, and I knew that I had no chance unless I could get into the boat. The motor was under me, and it served as a step.

Naked arms clutched at me, but I beat them off, striking with the muzzle of my revolver. There was a great commotion on shore, where probably the entire village we had passed at dark was gathered for the kill.

"Bannister! Bannister!" I yelled as I got into the boat.

But my voice only brought more wet arms feeling for me in the dark. I found one of the loose stanchions and swung it about me with my left hand, while I kept my revolver ready in the right. There was a lull in the attack as the boat began to drift away. I got my own flashlight from the leather pocket in the stern and threw the beam on the water.

I saw McLaw's body, spears still sticking up from his back, being dragged ashore by a dozen howling swimmers.

Bannister lay athwart the forward part of the boat's hull, just where the gunwales lifted toward the higher bows, his shoulders against the inner side of the port netting and his feet hanging over the gunwale to starboard. His mouth hung open, and I saw rising from under his chin what appeared to be his dark, cylindrical flashlight stuck in his shirt front, or caught in between arm and ribs, as if he clutched it to his body by pressure under the armpit. Arms were reaching upward from the water, grabbing with bloodstained fingers.

As I watched, the hands pulled at him. He seemed to be able to resist them but moved very little. In what would have been an instant had there been any sense of time, I saw him drawn feet forward over the bow; then I caught sight of what held him back—the shaft of the spear which had passed between his shoulders was caught in the gear in the bottom of the boat. What I thought was the flashlight under his arm was the spear point. I fired—again and again—but through the smoke of my revolver I saw Bannister plucked away from the spear and dragged overboard. He was dead beyond a doubt.

I was moving slowly downstream. I had an idea that I could find a paddle and go in to get the bodies of McLaw and Bannister. With the light shut off I found a paddle and took a few strokes. I turned the light on again to give me a bearing for the spot on shore.

The swimmers were ashore, not thirty feet from me. My powerful hand-light showed the flash of one of Jim Sing's tin hatchets over the white figure of McLaw. The swimmers with Bannister were just landing.

AS I was about to turn off the light a hand rose from the water overside and grasped my wrist. Heads with long, black, wet hair rose at the gunwales on both sides, but to port they could not get close. I saw the ribbon-like cinctures on the foreheads, the shining white teeth and the glittering eyes. They grinned in anticipation, those brown faces with the long black hair shining over their naked shoulders, as they counted mine as the third head of the night.

I threshed at them with the paddle, keeping the light on them, then dropped the blade and got my other revolver. It

stuck for an instant in the wet holster. I began firing again. My flashlight failed, having been wet. It paled in my hand, and I threw it at the nearest head in the water. Then the flashes from the muzzle of my gun blinded me, but I kept on pulling the trigger, even after I got nothing but the click of the pin against empty shells.

The current was taking me downstream. The boat was leaking in the fractures caused by our being lifted at the ends. I sat in the bottom of the boat, which slowly spun around as it drifted swiftly downriver.

Drums were pounding. Now they were close at hand. They filled the air with deep vibrations. As I listened, the boat swung with a sudden lurch and became fast in overhanging foliage on the river bank—on the same side of the river as the village we had passed. I could see light flickering through the thick brush of the jungle. It must have been fires in the tree-house village with the two headhouses.

Working quietly in the dark, I bailed the boat. The rumpus of the natives at the bridge, in the jungle trails to the village and in the village itself, covered any noise I made. I calked cracks with pieces of my shirt, finding the leaks by the water squirting inward. I kept watch of the river out where the stars were reflected, but there seemed to be no sign of natives following.

I knew I had to get past that village before morning. There was not enough cover where I was to remain hidden by day. There was no way of knowing just how much food and water remained in the boat. Even if I had found another flashlight, it would have been foolish to use it, as it would have betrayed my position to natives passing up from the village or returning over the trails.

All sense of time was lost. But it must have been about two in the morning, judging by the way the moonlit band had come down the distant peaks, that I started out and paddled across the river. The drums were booming only at intervals now, their anger gone, their triumph plain enough. *Two-two-two* they said, when they talked at all. They were telling distant neighbors of two new heads. *Two-two-two-two!*

In the shadows of the overhanging jungles on the bank opposite the village, I drifted past. The headhouses were lighted up like Japanese lanterns, the fires within low but flickering — the dull fires used to smoke heads. Dogs yelped, and I could hear the jabbering of voices.

When daylight came I was in the white river mists down near the sea, by the smell of the tidal mud. I could hear the surf. I was safe.

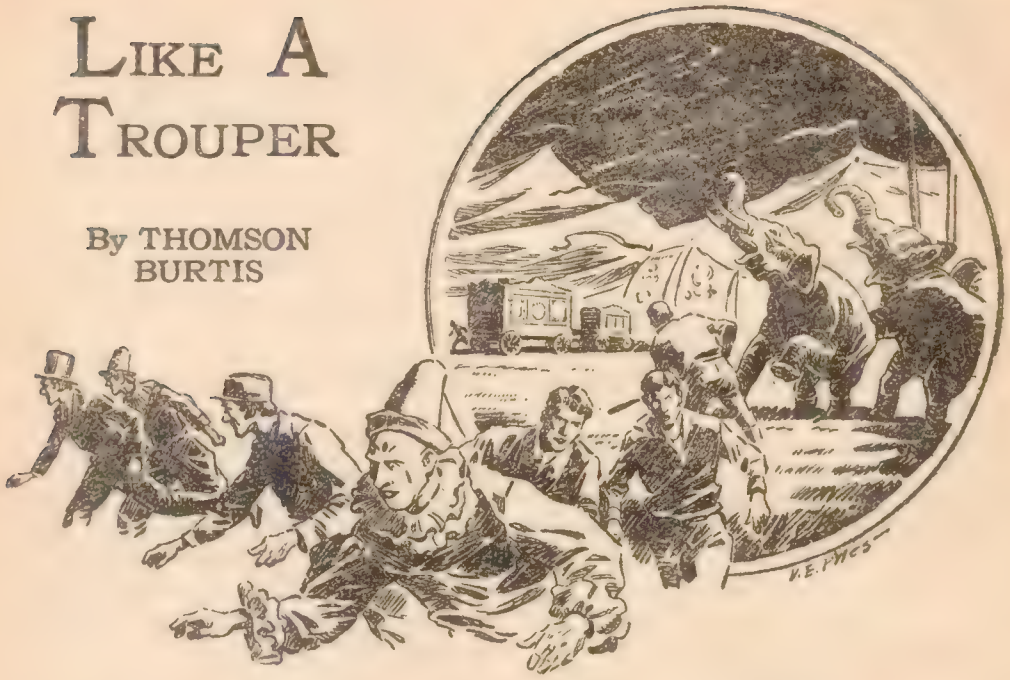
It struck me that afternoon, when I had slept, how trifling events often lead to tragic happenings. McLaw, while a student in Edinburgh, read an idle paragraph in an inconsequential newspaper about the language of the hill tribes of the Mawa Valley. He began to study the dialect simply as a hobby—and McLaw became a trophy. As for Bannister, he went up the Mawa on a chance remark he had heard at breakfast in a hotel at Thursday Island about gold being in the river if you went high enough to find the sandy banks. Myself, I'm just a sufferer from itchy feet and will go anywhere, like the Irishman at the funeral, "Just for the ride."

There is a rumor that the smart little Chinese who runs the grass hotel on the coast sends advance information about any party going into the mountains. There is also a story that Jim Sing himself made a queer net-like contrivance out of rattans, and the mesh was guyed all along the edges. It suggested the frame of a parachute. That was long before Bannister, McLaw and myself took Hanf and started out with modern machinery to show the head hunters just what civilization had up its sleeve for the Mawa River.

I am not interested in the gossip of the ports. But I do know that Jim Sing is still trading hatchets for gold. I can't quite forget it.

LIKE A TROUPER

By THOMSON BURTIS



BARRY O'BOYLE jumped a little as an extraordinary string of curses rattled from the boss animal man's lips.

"Get out o' there!" old Herman was snarling. He stabbed at the recalcitrant lion in the cage before him, as if trying to drive his pike right through the roaring beast. The animal cowered, snarling back.

"I'll be damned if this whole troupe isn't screwy!" O'Boyle thought to himself.

He might have added that he was the worst of the lot, but he did not allow himself even to think of that. His thoughts were bad enough already. He began to limber. His six-foot-one body bent into a bow and his head lowered; he kicked absently at the wheel of the monkey cage. Below his robe, his leg, trim in white tights, swung like a pendulum.

From the Big Top, adjoining the menagerie tent, the blare of the band rose to a crescendo, then stopped while Fred Ledget, the equestrian director, made an announcement.

A nearer voice inquired of O'Boyle:

"What's the matter, big boy? You look worse'n Raj!"

Barry glanced sidewise at fat little Jim Granger, one of the elephant men. The artificially brown skin and the ornate turban he wore scarcely disguised his appearance. Granger's full moon face never could be anything but that of a smiling kewpie.

"How's Raj acting today?" Barry inquired.

He glanced without interest at the towering bull elephant, second from the lower end of the line of eighteen. Raj was double staked and chained, and apparently brooding over the wrongs being done him.

"All right so far," Granger said blithely. "I'll go out and get drunk when that first performance in Chi is over, though—I'll tell you that. If I owned this show I wouldn't carry an elephant that's bullin', not even if he

could do a trapeze act!"

O'Boyle threw back his head in a characteristic alert gesture as the band started again. He gaged the progress of the show by the music. His lean, freckled face was like that of an alert eagle, although his ordinarily penetrating gray eyes were now dull with meditation. His crisp red hair was cut very short, revealing his well shaped head.

"Well, you can't blame the chief for taking a chance," he said absently. "Raj is feature bull, and everybody in the show's got the wind up—you know that."

And it was true. Just four days before, astounding news had reached the Sommer-Jason show. The Big Show had bought its only rival, and Sommer-Jason was now the property of the genius of the circus world. And in the Coliseum in Chicago, tomorrow night, the big boss would look over his property. Acts would be fired or promoted to the Big Show, increased in prestige and salary or reduced from their present high estate. It was scarcely to be wondered at that the Sommer-Jason outfit, playing a break-in week before their annual six-week curtain-raiser in Chicago, was a cross between a madhouse and a civil war.

"Sure," agreed Granger, "but a bad elephant's a bad elephant, and that's poison. By the way, what's bitin' you? You're safe."

"I guess I'm just worried like the rest," O'Boyle lied with a thin lipped smile. "Well, it's about time to acrobat."

THE Ford Flying Troupe was gathered close to the back door entrance to the Big Top. As their star flyer approached, half of them broke away and hurried through the menagerie tent to the connection entrance. The troupe worked simultaneously in two sections — one over each end ring. Barry's eyes met Larson's. Then he glanced up at the lowering sky. For the last four days it had been an ordeal for Barry to look at the furrowed face of Larson, his veteran catcher.

"Looks like weather," the young Irishman said. "Now wouldn't it be swell to have a blowdown the night before the Coliseum?"

The air was oppressive. Black clouds hung low overhead.

The ballet girls and clowns were streaming from the arena. The band swung into a march.

"Here we go." Ned Ford nodded.

The six men and three girls threw off their nondescript bathrobes, and, in tights covered by embroidered coolie coats, marched into the packed Big Top. It was Founder's Day in Gary, and the show was packed even for the matinée.

Stocky, kindly Ned Ford, owner and trainer of a dozen flying acts, dropped back alongside Barry.

"Larson knows," he said.

"You mean—"

"That you've been rehearsing as a catcher, to replace him. He saw us yesterday afternoon. He's a wild man, so we rehearse again after the matinée. Ten to one he'll get drunk, or quit, or both, and you'll have to work catching in the Coliseum."

Barry threw his coolie coat over one of the net guys. One of the girls was swinging up on the net, another tripping across it toward the ladder which swung from the pedestal up under the canvas. The huge crowd, buzzing with anticipation, contributed a low bass drone to the lively music of the band.

"I told you he knew," he said jerkily. "I'll be so damn glad when he's out of this troupe I'll do a snake dance up Randolph Street. Ned, that bird gives me the creeps every time I work with him. He as good as told me to watch myself."

"That doesn't mean anything," Ford told him. "His bark's a lot worse than his bite."

"That's easy to say. You don't have to let him throw you around up there!"

"Hell, boy, do you think I'd let you work with him if I had any doubts?"

Ford said. His voice was surprisingly high and thin. "The old boy's forty-eight. He's through and he knows it, and he's like a bear with a sore paw. Don't get your wind up—it won't be long now."

"It'd better not be," Barry told him flatly.

They were standing alongside the net. The catchers and flyers were climbing to the pedestals.

"Ever since it was decided back in Winter quarters that I was to break in as a catcher—it was dumb in the first place—"

"The hell it was," Ford told him levelly. "You're getting too heavy for a flyer, and you know it. What do you care? You're going to quit being a kinker and be a boss next year."

It was true. Zack Ferry, who owned a small piece of the show and managed it, had the career of his wide shouldered foster-son all blocked out for him. Young Hooley Hadley was coming along fast as a flyer and would be able to step into Barry's routine before the season was over.

"I don't care," Barry returned, "but I do care about working opposite an old coot that's a drunkard and who figures I'm taking his job away from 'im!"

"It won't be long now!" Ford repeated. "If the old fool would act halfway decent, Zack would find a place for him somewhere—not that anything but being an acrobat would satisfy him."

Barry put his hands on the edge of the net. Larson was tripping across the net to the catcher's ladder, the muscles of his gorilla-like shoulders writhing like a nest of snakes as he flexed them.

Barry got up on the net, climbed the ladder and took his place on the pedestal, the narrow platform from which the flyers take off in their miraculously beautiful rushes through the air.

He looked at the other pedestal and found Larson's eyes on him. Gaunt, gray-haired, his bulging muscles protruding in knots on legs, arms and shoulders, the veteran was unhooking his trapeze without looking at it. He worked the center trapeze opposite Barry.

The band switched to a dreamy waltz. Thirty-five feet below, five thousand people gradually became silent. Larson, a little in advance of the other two catchers, came swinging across the tent. As the three catching trapezes reached the top of their swing, the catchers slowly lifted their knees over the bars and hooked their ankles around the ropes.

The steaming air was sticky and oppressive. Barry felt that the silent throng was waiting for something to happen.

"I'm going nuts!" he jeered at himself as he grasped his trapeze. He pictured Larson's eyes on him, threatening him.

THE three flyers, Barry in the center, were waiting, grasping their trapezes.

"Go!"

It was a signal from Larson. Barry pushed off the pedestal in a sweeping arc across the tight net which was stretched a few feet above the ground. He swung high, and in a moment he was rushing back across the tent. As his body hurtled past the pedestal on the upswing, he thought of Jack Blane, with the Hanneman-Waters show. A property boy had slackened one of the main guys of the pedestal too soon. The platform had eased forward and the flyer's body had hit it on one of those upswings; it had broken Blane's back.

The upswing had carried him close to the ceiling of the Big Top, and now he flashed downward. He lifted his feet backward until they rested on the bar, his arms outstretched behind his body.

Larson was swinging toward him, head down. At just the right instant, Barry left the bar, his body straightening in a beautiful layout as his outstretched hands reached for Larson's. He caught the catcher's upper forearm, and Larson's hands closed on Barry's arms. As they slid their hands down to the wrist

grip on the swing toward the catchers' pedestal, Barry got one glimpse of Larson's eyes; they were bloodshot.

When they swung back toward the center Larson threw him, twisting Barry's body at the same time. Free in the air, Barry did a half-pirouette as his trapeze swung up to him. He swung back to the pedestal.

"One gone," he thought. He had done a simple bird's nest—and he felt as if he had survived an ordeal.

Two, one-and-one-half hooks by the two outside flyers, then birds' nests by the three girls, simultaneously, and it was time for Barry to work alone. Already Larson was swinging down toward him, head down. Barry left his pedestal. On the back swing he got his knees below the bar, his arms rigid behind him.

"Now!" snapped Larson.

Barry threw himself off backward. His body turned through the air like a pinwheel. One complete back somersault, half of another one, and right there ahead of him were Larson's arms. Barry's grip slipped on one of them, but he caught Larson's wrist in time.

"You scratched hell out of me," snarled Larson as they swung gracefully toward the catchers' pedestal. "If you can't grip right, why don't you cut your nails?"

Barry said nothing. Back on the flyers' pedestal one of the girls was releasing his trapeze again, timing perfectly. He and Larson rushed down toward the center again. Larson threw him into the half-pirouette and he caught his bar. His body felt damp and weary, and he relaxed as if exhausted on the pedestal.

A carrying somersault by the outside men, then a plunge by the three girls—simply a straight layout from a position with knees under the bar—and once again Barry was up. This time he climbed to the raise, a small bar set three or four feet above the pedestal, exactly in the center. For a dramatic half minute he stood there while the crowd gazed at him in awed silence.

He glanced down at the narrow safety net far below and thought of a good many things that could happen.

"Damned if that old coot hasn't got me buffaloed," he told himself savagely.

"Go!" barked Larson.

Barry shoved himself off with all his strength. His swing carried him higher than ever before. Then back, and, as he started on the upswing, he raised his body by his arms. He shot past the pedestal and on up until his red hair brushed the ceiling. Then a terrific rush downward, Larson swinging slowly toward him. With a powerful wrench that took every ounce of strength in his superb body, he left the bar. He flung himself upward and backward, aided by the speed of the swing and the power of his arms.

Two lightning-like back somersaults—he was coming out of the double . . .

Where were those waiting arms? Then he saw Larson. Larson was at the end of the swing, his arms outstretched, but somehow Barry was a little to one side of the catcher and had finished higher than usual. Frantically Barry bent his body as he started to drop. His right hand touched Larson's left arm slightly below him. Barry's left pawed frantically to reach Larson's other arm. For an instant it seemed that Larson was deliberately keeping his right arm away from him; then the big flyer groaned in agony as the full weight of his dropping body was suddenly thrown on his right arm.

For a second or two, being slightly above the catcher, there had been no strain, but when he was brought up short it seemed that his arm had been ripped from his shoulder. Then a savage sidewise wrench made him cry aloud. His left hand clawed feebly for a hold. Larson's great paw clutched it with crushing force. His eyes blazed into Barry's with triumphant fury.

"Why the hell don't you leave your bar straight?" he rasped as they swung past the catchers' pedestal.

"What were you trying to do, tear my

arm out of joint?" Barry shot back at him.

"Do your work and you won't have to worry about your arms," Larson spat. "Now run to Zack and Ned and tell 'em I tried to cripple you—"

Barry had intended to tell him that he wouldn't do the double-pirouette back to his own trapeze, but he hadn't time. Larson threw him viciously, and Barry barely repressed a groan of pain. Feet down, head up, his body whirled dizzily in a double-pirouette. As his hands grasped the bar another stab of pain shot through his shoulder.

The applause was thunderous. Tall and motionless, he was a picture of confident power. The crowd could not know that his face was hot and tense and that his eyes were glaring across at Larson with the rage that only panic can beget.

Twice the catcher had twisted and wrenched his one arm—a trick as old as the circus. Barry realized that every week he was unable to work was another week's employment for Nels Larson.

His shoulder was dully paining him. He parried the quick, casual questions of the others with—

"Almost missed that one, but no harm done."

THE rest of the act was a mental ordeal even worse than the physical pain he felt. Tight lipped, his freckles standing out against his sudden pallor, he went through the two-and-a-half back somersault to a foot catch, but he called off the crowning trick of the act and the one that had made him its star. He didn't dare risk his shoulder, he told himself. The fact of the matter was that at the moment he was utterly incapable of trusting his life to Nels Larson.

He even omitted his usual complicated drop to the net after the act was over. No explanation was necessary to the show-wise property boys and canvasmen who had seen the miscue.

When the act was over, Larson stalked toward the pad room alone. Ned Ford was waiting for Barry.

"How bad were you hurt?" he asked tensely.

"Nothing to worry about. Shoulder's a little sore, but I'd better not rehearse," Barry told him.

They stepped aside to allow a whooping cavalcade of cowboys and cowgirls to dash toward the ring. The performance was almost over. Side by side, the taciturn, square faced veteran and his taut star walked through the back yard and into the men's dressing room at one side of the pad room. It was partitioned off from the center of the big tent, where the ring stock was housed, and at the opposite end was the women's dressing room.

Ford didn't speak until they entered the tent. There were three long lines of wardrobe trunks set on the grass, a campstool and a pail of cold water in front of each. Clowns were washing off their garish makeup in the cold water. Down at the extreme end of the center line of trunks Larson was stripping off his tights.

"Better not work tonight," Ford said casually. "Hadley can do the drop, and might try the triple. Better save yourself for the Coliseum."

A wave of relief surged over Barry, followed immediately by a bitter revulsion of feeling.

"That isn't necessary," he snapped. "I'll work. I'll get Shanty to rub it down."

At that moment Mr. Shanty Hogan thrust his head in the doorway as if answering to his name. His voice was famous among boss canvasmen. It bulged the walls of the tent.

"What the hell?" he bellowed jovially. "I get up from a nap in the stake-and-chain wagon to see a flyin' act and they lay down on me. What's the matter, boy?"

Barry, naked in front of his trunk, put on shirt and shorts in two lightning-

like motions. He was terse.

"Twisted my shoulder a little. Stick around, Shanty; I'll need a massage."

Socks, sneakers, gray flannel shirt and trousers, and Barry was dressed. He joined Shanty at the door.

Ned Ford's eyes followed them and then shifted to Larson, who was wiping his lips and putting something back into his trunk.

"Is he drinking again?" wondered Ford.

Hogan asked Barry—

"What happened, twist your shoulder?"

"Yeah, and that's what I want to talk to you about," Barry told him.

For several seasons Barry O'Boyle and Shanty Hogan had been practically inseparable. Barry, determined to learn everything there was to know about running a show, had dogged the boss canvasman's trail day after day.

Silently, the two men now picked their way through the back yard toward the menagerie tent. Hogan glanced sidewise, and frowned as he scrutinized Barry's drawn face. Then he looked up at the sky, which was almost black and seemed to be closing down on the show.

"I'll have enough on me mind gettin' this show off the lot without thinkin' of anybody else's troubles," he snorted gruffly. "Looks like a muddy lot t' me."

"And the Coliseum tomorrow," Barry said absently. "Why couldn't they give us until Monday to open?"

"Because, my boy, a Saturday night opening in Chicago, with the big boss steamin' it up, will be the biggest thing ever pulled in the big show business outside of Madison Square Garden," Hogan stated. A whisper from him was louder than the sideshow barker's best shout.

As they entered the menagerie tent, the cats were being fed, roaring and snarling as they worried their meat or exhibited their rage at having to wait. Hogan stopped opposite Raj. The big elephant was eating his hay, but lifted his little red eyes to gaze at the gargantuan Irishman.

"Did you see Raj in the ring this afternoon?" Hogan inquired.

Barry leaned against a quarter pole. His eyes were on the hippopotamus, just opening his mouth to allow a keeper to throw a large pailful of fodder down his throat.

"No," he said.

"Never seen him work better in me life," boomed Hogan. "He socked that ball halfway down the tent in the baseball game, and his waltz was a riot. The big boss'll see somethin' he ain't never had in the big show when Raj does his stuff."

"Or he'll have about a hundred thousand dollars' worth of damage suits to pay up if Raj decides to get temperamental," Barry put in.

"What's bitin' you?" asked Hogan.

"I'll tell you what's biting me," Barry said slowly. "Nels Larson."

"Applesauce!" snorted Hogan, but suddenly his narrowed eyes were hard and bright. "Larson's old and peculiar, yes, but he was troupin' before you was born. He may be sore at the world, but he ain't killin' nobody. Come on in the Big Top where we can sit down. I see I gotta talk to you. That's the trouble with you young punks, always goin' off at half cock!"

MR. SHANTY HOGAN was about to become difficult. Barry fell in beside him as they walked up toward the connection. The last of the crowd had streamed out into the midway.

"You know what got Larson off on the wrong foot this season as well as I do," Hogan said finally.

"You mean because they wouldn't let him do that new fall to the net?"

"Sure. He figured he was gonna be in the trouper's paradise this year. Everything in the ring stopped, special announcements about the greatest acrobatic drop ever done, and the Big Top all to himself."

"Can't he understand that nobody wanted him to kill himself, that he's

simply too old any more—"

"Did anybody realize he was through until it was crammed down his throat?" demanded Hogan as they entered the vast arena. "He'd been workin' four years on that and, when he gets where he can do it, they tell him he can't. You don't realize it, because you ain't a kinker at heart. But feature billin', special announcement, all that stuff—hell, boy, that's life to a performer! It just about broke Nels's heart."

"I know," Barry admitted, "but he's likely to throw me clean off the net some night—"

"There he is now," Hogan interrupted him.

Larson was walking into the Big Top through the back door. With him was a gangling property boy who was supposed to be a distant relative.

The Ford Troupe was rehearsing without Barry, breaking in Hadley. In every ring performers were working on their acts—the Hodgini Troupe coaching little twelve-year-old Charley; the troupe of black high school horses being put through a new routine; a dozen acts polishing off new tricks in a frantic effort to have them ready for the Coliseum opening.

Larson sat down on one of the benches, leaning his elbows on his knees and cupped his chin in his hands. He stared at the bodies swaying gracefully above him.

Hogan said to Barry:

"You ain't been in this business thirty years, so you don't know. But watchin' him gives me the creeps. Let's get out of here and go eat."

They started out through the midway toward the cook tent. Suddenly Hogan stopped in his tracks.

"Forgit about Nels Larson—and do your stuff! I've known him twenty years. I'll talk to him if you like, but for heaven's sake be a trouper and not an old woman."

The blood flooded Barry's face, and his head came back belligerently. But he quickly relaxed and said wearily:

"O.K. But talk to him, will you? Shanty, it don't take but a simple twist or so for a catcher to break a man's arm."

"Sure," said Hogan, as they walked into the stag side of the cook tent. "But if Nels Larson wanted to break you up, he wouldn't 've missed, big boy!"

Barry ate little. He soon made his way to the stake-and-chain wagon for his regular nap. The air was stuffy beneath a black sky that was like an iron ceiling.

"Looks bad," grumbled Low Down Red, the stake-and-chain man, as he straightened the pillow on the single cot inside the small red wagon.

"Uh-huh," Barry agreed, and dropped into troubled slumber.

He got up between four and five o'clock every morning to study the layout of the lot and he never got to bed before two after the tear-down was over, so sleep during the day was a necessity.

The stake-and-chain man shook him awake at nine-thirty, and Barry hit the floor with a bound. Great gusts of wind shook the solid wagon. The rain was battering it like hail.

"A hell of a night, but nothing's happened so far," bawled Low Down Red.

BARRY plunged out into the storm. Through the rain he saw that the menagerie top had already been taken down. The animal cages were being hauled off the lot with from six to twelve horses to a cage. Half the elephant herd, swaying uneasily, were standing in a long line, their backs humped against the howling storm. A canvas wagon, its wet cargo twice as heavy as usual, was bogged to its hubs in the mud. Twelve horses in front, a six-horse team coupled to each side, and old Martha and Raj pushing in the rear, couldn't seem to budge it. The old boss hostler, unprotected against the pelting of the rain, was astride his pony, cracking a long whip over the heaving dapple-gray baggage horses. The menagerie top pole wagon

was moving slowly, pushed by two elephants and hauled by eighteen horses.

The pad-room top was swaying perilously as Barry entered. He was late and had no time to answer the staccato comments that were thrown at him. He arrived at the back door of the Big Top just in time.

Larson's face hit him like a blow. It was contorted with rage, and bloodshot eyes burned into Barry's as the catcher's lips moved silently.

"Shanty talked to him," Barry thought miserably. "I should have done it myself—"

The band swung into a march, and they entered the Big Top. The canvas was swaying until the center poles bent, and a continuous line of spectators was leaving, preferring the howling storm outside to the perils of the swaying tent. The show was going through the program at breakneck speed, and the troupers were grim and nervous.

As the Ford Troupe reached their pedestals the uneasy crowd seemed to quiet a trifle. A deafening clap of thunder was followed by a gust of wind that shook the Big Top from end to end.

Barry, his thoughts on the show, almost forgot himself. The Ford Troupe went through their routine as if to waste a second would mean disaster. As Larson caught him on the first trick, Barry stared angrily into his enemy's eyes.

When the time came for the two-and-one-half back somersault to a heel catch, Barry did it without a quiver. As he reached his pedestal, a clap of thunder frightened at least a quarter of the audience from their seats and sent them into a panicky dash for the exits.

Across the tent, Ned Ford was waving a signal. The band leader caught it. The rest of the act, including Barry's triple somersault, would be cut. One by one the flyers and catchers dropped to the net in graceful variations of swan dives and somersaults. When it came Barry's turn—he was last and usually an announcement of his drop was made—he hesitated. There was no sense in doing that difficult stunt for the frightened remnant of a crowd.

"Any excuse is an excuse for me not to work," he told himself with savage contempt.

He glanced below to make sure that none of the waiting property boys had started his work too soon. He noticed Larson standing at the back door to watch—Larson, whose unparalleled drop to the net had never been shown to the public. Probably he was musing bitterly right now upon the fact that Barry, with a back somersault, pirouette and finishing forward somersault, enjoyed a star rating.

Barry noticed vaguely that the stringy prop-boy, Kramer, was standing to one side of the net, close to one of the many guy ropes that ran to the complicated rigging of the flying act. Then, grasping the fly bar with crossed hands, he was off on his first swing. At the top of the swing he switched one hand, turned his body and faced the pedestal he had just left. Using his body to help the swing, he hurtled across the tent. A thrilling rush, and his upturned feet brushed the canvas forty-five feet above the ground. Now he was coming back across the tent in the "break swing". As the thunder rolled again he gathered himself.

Then it happened.

Just as he jerked his legs upward for the start of the back somersault, something happened to the bar in his hand. One end of it came loose as if the rope on that side had broken. His right hand on the loosened end of the bar was doing him no good. It was too late to stop himself, and he had thrown his body with too much power to be able to keep his grip with his left hand alone. He tore free from the bar, his body hurtling over to the left in a cast position. A spinning mass of arms and legs totally out of control, he was staring down at the unprotected ground. He had been thrown at least three feet to one side of the narrow safety net.

Now he was falling. A nauseating split-second of utter panic and then a

fatalistic calm descended upon him. He scarcely knew what he was doing, but all the while some second self seemed to be watching him from a point outside himself — watching him with cool appraisal as he fought his fight. Desperately he twisted his body.

The knowledge gathered by hundreds of hours spent hurtling through the air seemed then to rush from his subconscious mind and help him. Every muscle in his body seemed to become rubber. It was like hauling himself up with his boot straps, striving to hurl himself to one side and make his dizzy drop angle toward the net.

The crowd, sensing the disaster, had frozen into utter stillness, but property boys and performers were frantically rushing around.

Barry never knew how he did it. Fifteen feet above the net he was squarely over the edge of it, head down. His body spun on over. Head up, six or seven feet above the net, he twisted himself over. It carried him forward a little. His hands and head struck the net, and he doubled his body into a jackknife. The edge of the net hit his stomach like a knife. As he bounced, his legs flew up underneath the net and sank into it. His body was flipped backward. He would have hit the ground on his back if Ned Ford and Shanty Hogan had not been there to catch him.

The crowd was leaving in droves now, as if what had just happened, which they didn't understand, was final proof of the menace of the storm.

"Where's that damned sidekick of Larson's, that prop-boy, Kramer, who was standing alongside that cable before I started?" he snarled.

He plunged through the frightened prop-men who were taking down the apparatus with desperate speed.

"Where's Kramer?" he shouted.

The frightened prop-boys mumbled incoherently and looked around them stupidly. The stringy Kramer had disappeared. Suddenly Barry felt an iron grip on his arm. He whirled around to face Shanty Hogan, stern and hard-eyed.

"Come with me," snapped the boss canvasman.

Water flowing from his battered hat, his face grimy and his clothes caked with mud, Hogan half dragged, half pushed the quivering O'Boyle toward the back door.

"Be yourself, damn it!" he shouted into Barry's ear.

"That damn Kramer slacked off my bar and tried to kill me!" Barry flung over his shoulder.

His face was blanched, his red hair like a flaming battle flag. He broke into a run across the back yard. Hogan, entirely forgetful of the rain, slipped and slid through the mud as he followed Barry, losing ground with every step.

Then the snapping of poles, the rending of canvas and the shrieks of the wardrobe women announced the blowing down of the wardrobe top. Hogan turned in his tracks, fell down, picked himself up, and waded toward the minor disaster just as Barry catapulted through the door of the pad-room.

WATER was spreading over the ground, and mud stained troupers were trying to wash and dress. Most of them were standing on rickety camp-stools, shivering in the wind. Larson was walking up one aisle. He turned as Barry bounded toward him.

"Well, you didn't do it, did you?" Barry snarled.

The troupers were like so many grotesque statues.

"Do what?" rasped Larson.

"Your punk poor relation slacking off the main fly bar on me and beating it, huh? You couldn't cripple me this afternoon, so you tried to kill me tonight, and you couldn't even do that!"

Stunned kinkers, their eyes wide with horror, licked their lips and gulped convulsively. Barry, a streak of flame among that shivering crew, blasted the gaunt older man with a tirade of accusation. Larson did not say a word.

His face went blank, his hard gray eyes opaque. He stared into the hot eyes of his enemy as if groping for reason. He looked dumbly about him and found nothing but hard eyes and hostile faces. Then without a word he turned and stalked toward his trunk.

Barry watched him. Erect in his tattered raincoat, the old man half walked, half stumbled past his trunk, lifted the billowing side of the dressing room and disappeared into the night.

"Barry, you didn't mean it?" shouted some one, his voice cracking with excitement.

"The hell I didn't!"

Barry's hot words poured forth in another searing torrent. All trace of the self-control he had toiled so hard to attain had left the strapping Irishman. He suddenly ran toward the crew which was attempting to control a fidgety bunch of ring stock and get them off the lot, without the slightest idea of what he was going to do. He needed action, to have his hands on something—

Nearby a frantic trumpet of rage and terror split through the din of the storm. Old Martha, trumpeting madly, was rushing across the lot toward Barry. A shivering little white dog had scooted against her leg, and a rumble of thunder had done the rest.

Suddenly the line of ten "punks", the young elephants that were swaying at their stakes while their elders worked, pulled their stakes as one. The working elephants, panic stricken at old Martha's call of fear, whirled from their work.

The herd was stampeding.

The back yard wall was down, and Martha was rushing past Barry on her way to freedom. The punks were coming head-on to join their leader. Elephant men, working their bullhooks desperately, were running with them, but the elephants were bound for Martha, their leader. Five yards back of her, Raj gave vent to a mighty trumpet call. He turned aside and crashed into a costume wagon. In a few seconds he had stamped it to kindling wood.

Martha was opposite Barry now; and without conscious thought he bounded forward, shouting at her. Trunk high, trumpeting her panicky call, she paid no attention. He launched himself at her, and his hands caught one flopping ear.

It did not halt her mad career. Barry could not climb up to her back, and he could not stop her. Swinging beneath her open mouth and high-held trunk, he dared not drop for fear he would be trodden to death. Back of them the lot was a madhouse. And only fifteen yards away, leading the punks, came Raj. From other parts of the lot the working bulls rushed to join the stampede.

Barry got a better hold on the top of Martha's ear. He looked back of him —a horde of great shadowy shapes were thundering toward him, leaving destruction in their wake. Then he shouted, although he could not hear his own voice above the roar. He saw Raj pick up a struggling figure and throw it twenty feet. At the same second a white shape launched itself from the gloom. One mighty bound, and the ghost-like figure of a man had vaulted to the back of the bad elephant. It was Larson, still in his ring costume.

Martha smashed right through a parked limousine. She crossed a deserted street. Barry, twisting and turning his body, hung desperately to the beast's huge ear. She knew who he was. Sooner or later her terror would spend itself. He must not drop, for Raj was now a raging demon.

Barry, fighting like a madman to stop Martha, twisted his body outward to look behind. Raj's trunk curled toward the man on his back, and Larson struck it a mighty blow with an iron stake he had in his hand. He raised the stake again and then, astride Raj's back, he froze, stick held high and eyes fastened to Barry's swinging body, plainly visible in the light thrown from the windows of a house close by.

It seemed that Raj had seen him too. With a bellow of rage, the bull increased the speed of his awkward run. At the same instant, Larson got into action again. He threw himself forward desperately. His weapon rose and fell twice across Raj's eyes and trunk.

Suddenly a new and greater peril loomed.

He looked ahead. A few feet in front of the charging Martha was a concrete garage, its wooden double doors closed. Barry, hanging to Martha's ear, would hit the concrete alongside the door—He threw his body beneath the beast's trunk, but he was not in time. The door splintered as the great brute crashed into it.

Barry's body thudded against the concrete, and he dropped like a wet rag.

From within the garage came a series of crashes and the sound of breaking glass as Martha forced her way through. The herd was trumpeting—and pursuing men were shouting. The lot, two hundred yards away, was a chaos of sound. But in the midst of the bedlam, Barry, unable to move, lay and stared at Larson.

Raj, head down, had changed his course slightly and was bearing down on the paralyzed O'Boyle. For one terrible instant Barry gave up hope. Larson had ceased to battle and was like a marble statue on the back of the charging elephant. The great bull wasn't twenty feet from Barry when Larson made his move. Swiftly he turned around until his back was toward Barry and he was lying on top of Raj's head, his feet kicking the elephant's trunk. The half-blinded bull slowed. Larson, a hand gripping each flopping ear, slid down the great beast's trunk until the top of his head was even with Raj's. His body, half covering the mad bull's eyes, his legs curled around the trunk. He held to the right ear with his left hand. With the stake in his other hand he gouged savagely at the elephant's wide open mouth.

WITH a bellow of rage the maddened bull stopped and whirled around, his rear feet scarcely five feet from Barry. He barely noticed old Martha emerging from the garage. The concrete back wall had been too much for her, but she had destroyed the car within.

All Barry could think of was:

"Nels could have jumped off. Raj was after me—"

Raj lowered his head. His trunk strove to curl around the body of the man who was torturing him. Now it was seizing Larson's leg—

At that moment a mighty bellow issued from Martha's opened mouth. Perhaps she had hit the back wall of the garage hard enough to bring her to herself; perhaps her panic had disappeared as quickly and with as little reason as it had come.

Even Raj hesitated at that warning from the leader. Head down, Martha charged. The punks milled around uncertainly.

Martha hit Raj from the side. Larson scrambled to the bull's back. The gasping elephant men plunged fearlessly into the herd, their bullhooks busy. Raj was hemmed in by them, and Martha was giving him a dressing down such as only the queen of a herd can give. Barry was cowering against the wall in the shadow as great feet stamped about him. He saw Larson leap from back to back, and finally off into the darkness on the other side.

Then the boss elephant man spotted Barry. No sooner had he stooped to lift the flyer than that half-conscious young man ceased to fight against his desire to faint.

He was transported to the train and put in his bunk. At five o'clock in the morning he awoke. Surprisingly enough, he had fully recuperated; except for bruises all over his body; there seemed to be nothing seriously wrong. He was in the stag car, and already the weary troupers were sound asleep, although the train had not yet started.

The rumble of the wagons still loading down at the runs came to his ears as Barry swung out of his bunk, dropped off the car and walked up to the privilege car. In his mind's eye there was the constant picture of Larson fighting his battle with Raj. For the first time in a week Barry was tranquil.

Loud voices came from the pie car. He entered the door and leaned against the counter which spread half its length. The other half of the car, the gambling tables, were without customers and were being used as seats for the bosses of the show, from Zack Ferry to Shanty Hogan. The huge Irishman was yelling his head off, and as he saw Barry he pointed one trunk-like arm at him.

"There he is! Look at him!" he shouted. "So yellow he couldn't fall off a doorstep without cryin'. There's the bum that's broken an old-timer's heart and sent him off accused of murder!"

"Shut up, Shanty," snapped Ferry.

"Fire me, and see whether I give a damn!" Shanty roared. "I'm quittin' right now, and you and your Willie Boy can run this kindergarten like you please!"

He whirled on Barry once more. Caked with mud from top to toe, his hair in wild disarray, he flayed the pale faced redhead with his tongue until tears of rage stood in the impulsive Barry's eyes and his veins seemed to run liquid fire. And yet he controlled himself—controlled himself while he learned from Hogan's blistering words that from the lowest canvasman to Erva Ford, star of the show, the Sommer-Jason outfit was convinced that Larson and Kramer had plotted to kill Barry, and that Larson, a broken old man, had disappeared. Hogan ended with a string of deadly insults.

"That's what I think of you!" he snarled, walking toward Barry. "Now, if you got any guts left—"

"I got guts enough left to say that you're right," Barry cut in very quietly.

Bewilderment took the place of rage in Hogan's face.

Amid deathly silence, Barry told the story of Larson's single-handed fight against Raj.

"I was wrong," he concluded, his suffering eyes sweeping slowly from one emotionless face to another.

"Did Larson run away?"

"No!" roared Hogan. "He's a trouper. He left a note with Zack that he'd be at the Coliseum tomorrow night ready to work, and when *he* says something you can tie to it!"

"All right, then," Barry said quietly. "I've got an idea. I said I was wrong, and I know I am, because when Larson had a chance to see me killed he didn't take it. This show, through my fault, has done him a hell of an injustice, and there's one way to make it up to him."

Then he started talking—with such earnestness that his words swept aside the half hearted remonstrances which Zack Ferry offered against Barry's plan.

"It's all we can do, and how Nels would love it," Barry finished, his eyes glowing.

"But we can't be responsible for making him hurt himself," Zack Ferry said.

"Hell," Shanty Hogan's bellow interrupted him. "He'd rather die that way than live any other!"

Barry carried his point. So it was that next morning, as the long white show train started to show signs of life, Barry went from car to car and spoke to every man and woman.

Over and over again he told his story . . .

SOMMER-JASON was getting ready for the most eventful show of its career. The famous new owner had seen to it that every one of importance in Chicago would be there. Costumes cleaned, rigging shined, candy butchers and canvasmen dressed within an inch of their lives, an augmented band and six hundred troupers nerved to the highest pitch, Sommer-Jason prepared for the Chicago opening—and the busiest of them all was Barry.

He did not see Larson until they gathered at the entrance. The veteran was last to join the acrobats, barely a minute before it was time for them to go on. Larson looked five years older. He glanced neither to the right nor left as he walked toward them. Then his eyes rested on Barry without emotion.

"I found Kramer back in Gary. He's here. You scared him off when you went looking for him."

That was all. There was neither hatred nor any other feeling in his words or eyes, although he knew nothing of Barry's activities that day. But the young Irishman didn't mind. He was in the grip of excitement such as he had never felt before.

The march started, and a wave of applause from packed balconies and crowded arena seats beat down on the parade of lithe white figures. Trick after trick, as the acrobats worked with almost hysterical speed, clicked perfectly. The air over the two rings seemed full of flying white figures.

Barry's triple somersault to a hand catch was announced. When he had completed it, and had been thrown back to his bar, he scarcely heard the quarter minute of applause reverberating from the lofty rafters. Next came the drops.

One by one the acrobats made their graceful descents, until finally only Ned Ford and Larson on the catchers' pedestal and Barry over on the flyers' platform remained. Barry saw Ford say something to Larson and hold him from jumping. Then Ford dropped in a swan dive and Barry did the back somersault, pirouette and forward which had heretofore climaxed the exhibition of the world famous Ford Troupe.

The applause rose to a crescendo as he ran across the net and dropped off it. Then, abruptly, the waltz music of the band stopped and the lights in the Coliseum went out. Spotlights picked out the net, others focused on the motionless white figure high up under the roof and made it stand out like a statue. Barry, standing alongside the net, was looking up with his heart in his eyes. He could see the old man looking around him in utter bewilderment—just standing there. The arena hushed. Every one knew that when a performer had the arena to himself something unusual was to be expected.

Fred Ledget's voice carried through the loudspeakers to the remotest section of the great arena.

"Ladeez and gentlemen—you are about to see for the first time in the history of the world the crowning acrobatic achievement of history. Never before has it been publicly performed, even by the world's champion acrobat, whom you are about to witness risking his life to thrill you. No other man in the long line of great performers of the circus world has had the skill to accomplish it, none the daring to attempt it. Ladeez and gentlemen, Sommer-Jason present Mr. Nels Larson in the crowning feature of the world's greatest show—the most sensational dive ever witnessed by human eyes!"

There was a second of awed silence. Then, barely audible, came the exciting low roll of a drum from the orchestra stand. Suddenly it seemed to Barry that Larson's body grew larger. He was poised, his hands on his bar, gray head thrown back proudly as if the thrilling, ever increasing roll of the drum was a call to battle. Out he swung, the spectators not daring even to whisper, caught under the hypnotic spell of that single figure picked out by dazzling lights against the shadows of the vast structure. Back Larson rushed, then forward, so high that his toes were pointed almost straight toward the ceiling. Now came the back swing. Every human being attached to Sommer-Jason was watching. The laymen were under a spell, but the hearts of the troupers had stopped. Only they knew that Larson was taking his life in his hands and glorying in it.

His body left the bar with a mighty wrench. It was flung up and to one side in a back twister, a complete back som-

ersault with a twist added to it. It seemed that he had thrown his body over half the area between the edges of the net. Then his feet were down pointed toward the net and his body spun on its vertical axis, whirling like a white top. More than twenty thousand pairs of eyes stared dazedly. A split-second later he was hurtling down in a forward twister. Once again it seemed that his body had become two bodies at right angles, the one spinning horizontally and the other vertically.

Barry, drawn to such tension that he felt something must snap, saw the old man hit the net safely on his shoulders.

It was at that second that Barry O'Boyle's ability as a stage manager was proved beyond all shadow of a doubt. From six hundred circus throats, placed in all parts of the Coliseum, rose a whoop of triumph—six hundred pairs of hands were clapping almost before that whirling body hit the net. The band burst into the "Stars and Stripes Forever" and, in a mighty diapason of sound, the thrilled crowd was swept off its feet. Led by the shouting and cheering circus men, they too cheered and shouted. It was as if the nervous tension which had driven Sommer-Jason along in the fastest show they had ever given had communicated itself to the crowd and galvanized the onlookers.

Nels Larson, a star at last, strutted out of the arena waving his hands in old fashioned acknowledgment of the ovation which the troupers continued until he had disappeared from sight.

Shanty Hogan caught up with Barry in the aisle to the dressing room.

"You done a good job, boy," he rumbled in his deep voice. "Nels was kind of a boil on this show, but I reckon you lanced him one way or another."

"What are we going to do with him now?" Barry chuckled.

He realized that Shanty Hogan had forgotten his outburst of the night before.

"Hell, I don't know!" Hogan said. "He'll be wantin' to break his neck every day now. Nobody will be able to talk to him tonight. Thirty years a trouper, and tonight a star for the first time! Hell, the man'll be nuts!"

Hogan stopped opposite a door. He opened it quickly.

"Get in there!" he roared, and the next instant Barry was gazing at Larson.

Larson was removing a bottle from his lips. The light in his face faded. By the time he had set the bottle down on the shelf, his face was grim, but his eyes were still seeing visions. He didn't speak; he just faced them.

Shanty Hogan pushed himself forward.

"Nels, shake hands with the guy that persuaded Zack to let you do that stunt, the guy that staged it and insisted on makin' it a surprise party!"

Larson's fierce old eyes widened.

"You're a hell of a good man around an elephant, Nels," Barry said. "In fact, you're so good at a number of things that I've decided that if you really wanted to get me hurt, you wouldn't miss!"

"I wouldn't," Larson told him metallically.

"Which is proof that you didn't want to." Barry laughed. "Shake?"

"Sure. Have a drink?"

"Sure," boomed Hogan in an exact imitation of Larson.

When the ceremony was over and they had left the happy old man's room, Barry breathed a sigh of relief.

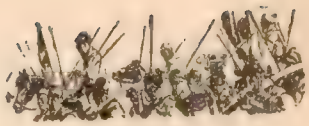
"I'm glad that's over," he said huskily. "I feel a hell of a lot better now."

"He feels so good there'll be no holdin' him now." Hogan grinned.

Which was no exaggeration. It took three days to effect a compromise with the veteran, which compromise was that he should do his drop at the Coliseum but not under canvas, with its attendant greater danger, on the road.

And when he broke his leg during the last week at the Coliseum and Zack Ferry saw to it that the big boss wired him an offer to be assistant lot superintendent on the big show, Larson wasn't unhappy. After all, he'd had his day.

The CAMP-FIRE



A free-to-all meeting place for readers, writers and adventurers

A COUPLE of years ago this magazine published a short piece of fiction entitled, "A Tropical Tramp" by Cliff Mosier. The author constructed his story around a salty old poem in which an old-timer of the tropical trails speaks out to a newly arrived tenderfoot, giving him benefit of his hard experience in slightly bleary tones. The opening lines were:

So, son, you've come to the Tropics; thought all that you had to do,
Was to sit in the shade of a cocoanut glade while the dollars rolled in to you . . . .

The poem is one that has been recited among men from Buenos Aires to Nome for years. I am familiar with it these fifteen years at least. At one time I entertained the idea that it first appeared in *Adventure* long ago, but the records show no trace and I'm rather too busy and too lazy to prowl through years of the magazine in search. I made inquiry around to some small extent, without avail.

One comrade reports:

I knew that tropical tramp poem by heart before there was an *Adventure*, consequently it did not originate there. I can closely fix the year it was printed by going back to where I was at the time. I had just come back from South America and was in Panama. I then went to Nicaragua. It was printed in 1910 or 1911 at the very earliest.

—EDGAR YOUNG

Do any of you possess a copy of the original publication? Or remember clearly the details of its appearance?

COMMENT by a genial and familiar voice from the Writer's Brigade; long past due but too interesting to pass up:

At latest reports even today any man who can once get out there (Burma) can be sure of making enough on rubies to keep going—any man, that is to say, who can swing a pick and shovel dirt and swallow the snootiness of the comfortably entrenched officials and white collar executives who in the East, look loftily sideways at the white brother who has to descend to manual labour.

And any man who knows even the barest smattering about stones can buy from native diggers and sell at a profit no further away than Rangoon city, the Burmese capital.

And of course any man who really knows stones and has a little of the spirit of adventure can buy bootleg from the illicit diggers and may happen every now and then on a prize. But he must really know stones; for the wily Chinamen have learned to import a really good grade of glass from Czecho-Slovakia, and the unwary tourist who goes to gawp at the ruby mines may buy a few carats for several thousand per cent of their value from a furtive gentleman at the street corner after dark.

This giant sapphire story, by the way, has a basis of truth. The man who turned it up was a native digger and—there *is* such a thing as luck. He worked for some four dollars a month shovelling dirt for anybody who would hire him. I had him myself once when I felt rich after a good month. The man saved up enough to buy himself a licence; and within his first fortnight he turned up this stone. A magnificent thing; actually too valuable for any local buyer to handle. Of course he went yawping around the village celebrating his luck, till somebody kicked him and sobered him up enough to make him understand he was being several heaps of a fool. Or perhaps the good friend looted him first; nobody knows. Anyway the man announced woozily that he had buried his stone and continued to celebrate his luck. And then the next thing anybody knew, somebody had cut his throat in a back alley.

And the stone is still there, somewhere. Nobody ever found it in all the half acre or so of ground that was dug up all around the hut that

the man shared with a dozen others of his kind. The eleven who were left complained to the police about their house being torn apart, and the whole gang was boosted out to keep the peace. And then a smart Chinaman came along and bought up the patch of ground and planted a potato crop on the well tilled field and sold them to the white folks for prices pretty near like they were rubies.

—GORDON MACCREAGH

A COMRADE whose voice is familiar to all discourses in a tone of authority on a rather fascinating subject:

Carrizozo, N. M.

In identifying bullets from a murder gun, or one recovered from the victim, the use of pistol cartridges in rifles by means of supplemental chambers may fog the trail for a time. The supplemental chambers were developed to use the less expensive ammunition in high-power for short range work.

For instance, the .32 pistol cartridge may be used in rifles of caliber .30-30, .30-40, .30-06, .300, .303, 8 M/M, and etc. The .380 Automatic cartridge is really caliber .36 and may be used in the .35 caliber rifles, and the .25 Automatic cartridge in the .250-300 Savage.

But the grooves in the barrels of high-power rifles are pitched at a more abrupt angle, or given a higher rate of twist to the inch of length of barrel than are the barrels of pistols intended for using shorter bullets of low velocity. This is because the longer the bullet in respect to its diameter the faster the spin must be to maintain the bullet's gyrostatic stability in flight. So as the grooves or rifles transmit the spin to the bullet, the long slim bullets of the .30 calibers require grooves in the barrels making one full turn in ten inches of barrel length. And, while some rifles have six grooves, most of the .30's have only four. These unusual markings on a pistol bullet are readily noticeable.

Pistol bullets recovered from the body of a man are very seldom deformed to the extent that they are unrecognizable. If they pass through the victim and strike a brick, concrete or rock wall they may splash into minute particles. But even then metal jacketed bullets are frequently only slightly deformed, as much of their force is absorbed by passing through the victim.

Modern rifle bullets are very seldom recovered from the body of the victim. High-power rifle bullets are all metal-jacketed or soft-nose and have ample energy to smash through any human bone. Even mid-range loads develop energy far more than enough to pass through a man at ranges for which they are adapted. Ordinarily when a rifle bullet is recovered from the body of a person, it is almost conclusive proof that the killing was accidental and the victim was struck by a spent bullet. (This, of course, does not include the little .22's.) Unless the man was lying down and the bullet ranged through the body endways, or struck directly in the ear, there is not enough dense tissue to stop the little metal cased .25-20, or .32-20 bullet when shot from a rifle at ordinary range.

The petrosal bone in the side of the head contains the essential organ of hearing and this part of the bone is the hardest substance in the human skeleton. If a man is shot in the ear with one of the smaller rifles, this small pyramidal bony structure may not be shattered, but driven through the soft brain tissue ahead of the bullet.

In one case this dense portion of the petrosal bone was driven through to the opposite side of the skull ahead of a .38 Special pistol bullet. And until a careful examination was made of the cracked and ruptured skull it was thought an explosive bullet had been used.

So-called explosive bullets not containing fulminate; but having a hollow point or other arrangement to cause sudden expansion on contact very seldom explode at velocities under 2400 feet per second. They may mushroom, flatten or otherwise deform and make a terrible wound. And very few pistol bullets mushroom because none of them attain a velocity greater than 1400 feet per second.

Even high speed hollow point rifle bullets with a velocity of 2500 to 3000 foot seconds may not explode or go to pieces in a man. In one recent case a man was shot through the chest with a boat-tail, hollow point bullet. It made a terrible wound, but the bullet did not explode. There were two holes in the snow bank behind him, one made by the jacket which had stripped, and the other made by the lead core much deformed.

The explosive effect so often heard of is caused by the bullet striking a membraneous sack of body fluid or a very soft tissue.

For instance; a bullet passing through the bladder tight with urine, or the stomach full of water, or the engorged gall bladder, will cause the organ to explode as a tight tin can full of liquid will when struck by a bullet. But the bullet will remain in one piece.

An ordinary .351 Winchester Self-Loading soft-nose bullet at about 1850 foot seconds passed through a man's brain and so pulped the entire head that it was as soft as a wet sponge. The features, while not scarred, were hardly recognizable. Yet, the bullet was recovered from a clay bank very slightly deformed.

Rifle bullets are not often found, but when they are recovered they are just as easy to identify as pistol bullets.

In shotguns things are different. Some American ammunition manufacturers place a distinctive metal coating over their shot. Others use a special lead alloy composition by means of which the factory load may be instantly recognized. Otherwise very little can be learned about the gun from the shot unless they are large, or the total number in the charge known. Then a very good idea of the gauge of the gun from which they were fired may be had.

It is the wads from the shotgun that tell the tale. They tell the gauge of the gun, whether the barrel was choke or cylinder bored, and thus in case of a double-barreled gun we can frequently state whether it was the right or left barrel that was used. And some manufacturers use distinctive moisture-resisting composition wads and their make thus disclosed. In some instances all the "load" information may be actually printed on the wad. If the empty shotgun shell is found it is easier to tie up with the gun than is the pistol or rifle cartridge.

—CARL E. FREEMAN

A COMRADE newly joining the Writers' Brigade, with a first story in this issue, rises according to old custom to introduce himself around the Camp-Fire:

Linwood, N. J.

I can put my experiences and observations into stories, which is, I believe, permissible; yet I find it very difficult to use them for a story of my life. I have been to college. I have been to sea. I have wandered and worked from the Atlantic coast to the very ridges of the Continental Divide and the Sierras to the south. I have been in the Army. I have had my share, thank God, of health and illness, poverty and comfort, rain and sun, sorrow and joy. I like the highlands best; for choice, the highlands of Mexico.

The story, "A Farm For Sale," had its origin in my "ham" days as a radio amateur. Another ham became my friend. After service in the Navy, he turned professional. His last ship went down with all hands. The story developed from my speculations about what might have happened; his possible reactions during the last crowded hour. I am sure, if he could read it, his great laugh would echo across the waters of Time. But I knew him for a man.

—RONALD B. KIRK

A SLIGHTLY shocked reader reports his dismay. But there is no reason for alarm; every magazine prints a surplus above probable sale so that the dealers may be well stocked. Rather that a dozen copies remain unsold, than a comrade find his stand sold out, and be forced to miss his *Adventure*.

Baltimore, Md.

Today I saw something that got under my skin. A newsdealer was returning some unsold copies of *Adventure*, and knowing a little about the publishing and book business, it came as something of a shock to see an old friend being sent back for lack of new friends.

I've read *Adventure* for years. One of the most curious copies I ever read was one that I picked up on the River Boat *Battambang* that grunted her way from Saigon to Siem-Reap, both of which places are, as you know in Indo-China. It was in 1916. I went up to Angkor-Thom to film motion pictures of the Khmer ruins. Really it wasn't an entire magazine as about the first fifteen pages and the last twenty pages had been torn off. The top and bottom of the magazine had been trimmed off almost flush with the type.

Just how it got aboard the *Battambang* and in the stuffy, heat-soaked dining salon is beyond me, nor could any of the officers explain; but there it was. Possibly the man-eating bugs that swarmed the decks at night brought it aboard; I don't know, but I do know that I enjoyed it.

The *Adventure* habit IS a habit.

—CLEM POPE

IT IS too early at this writing, due to the exigencies of magazine publishing, to report finally on the many letters that have come in response to my invitation to the C. C. C. members to join us about the Camp-Fire. But I am glad to include the following, which was among the first to arrive:

381st Company, C. C. C.
Wells Tannery, Pa.

In reading the recent issue in *Adventure*, I noticed in Camp-Fire that you desired the opinion of the C. C. C. boys in regard to their work. I really had formed no opinion until I read that the "Wood Hicks" (as we term them) have been covertly grinning at our efforts. Therefore this letter.

I will grant your premise that these men know more about logging operations than we boys do. But logging is not even mentioned in the C. C. C. curriculum. In fact, our chief duty is to correct the evils caused by loggers, both firms and individuals, who knew not the meaning of the word "conservation". It is obvious that, where an area has been burned or cut over, timber will not produce of its own accord. For example, our own state of Pennsylvania, once owning the largest stand of marketable white and yellow pine in the country, was unable to furnish enough of this timber to build barracks for the C. C. C. within her own boundaries.

The slogan of the old lumberman may be likened to the ancient Roman philosopy of life, "Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die". They reaped their harvest and we of the present generation are suffering for it. So much for that.

Here's another angle. The Oldtimers may know the difference between scarlet oak and red oak but do they know what to plant, and where to plant it, in order to prevent soil erosion and retain the fertility of the soil. Enter our foresters. Who are they? They are *young men* who have devoted four years of their lives and a large amount of their money studying forestry problems. But due to the ignorance of the State governments and the apathy of the public, these men were unable to use their talents. You can obtain government statistics showing the ultimate yield of their work in billions of dollars.

But let's return to the C. C. C. boy. Here, in a majority of cases, is a boy who graduated from high school into a depression. Months pass. Months spent, at first in looking for work and finally in pool rooms and on street corners. He joins the C. C. C. Why? Because he is ready for anything. He goes to a conditioning camp. After two weeks spent here, he is sent to the woods.

And so it goes. He is in the woods. Working, eating, sleeping, playing. And he is happy. He may swear a little, he may be a little toughened by his contacts, but he is working, he is making money, getting ahead, and I repeat he is happy.

—PAUL E. BEHE

A COMRADE adds a few important —and very interesting—details to the record of a certain grim frontier episode.

Kingman, Kansas.

It is noted in your last issue that Comrade Franklin Reynolds of Mt. Sterling, Kentucky, had a little something to say regarding one Pink Simms. Incidently he mentioned that Pink had a gun given him by "Barry" (sic) O'Connor whose posse took the gun away from Hendry Brown, marshall of Caldwell, Kansas, after that former companion of Billy the Kid had been shot for robbing the "Medicine Valley Bank at Medicine Bow." When Comrade Reynolds jumps away up into Wyoming to lay the scene of a robbery, murder and lynching that has always belonged to this part of Kansas (Southern) and to famous old Medicine Lodge, he does us wrong.

The shooting of Hendry Brown and the hanging of his three companions—Ben Wheeler, deputy marshal of Caldwell, Billie Smith and John Wesley took place at Medicine Lodge, Kansas, on May 1, 1884. They had ridden over from Caldwell, then a famous or infamous cowtown at the edge of the Cherokee land, 60 odd miles to Medicine Lodge, held up the Medicine Valley Bank, shot and killed the two bank officials, President Payne and Cashier Geppert. The citizens of the town captured them, killed Hendry Brown when he tried to escape and strung up the other three on an elm tree in the outskirts of the town.

"Barry" O'Connor, is of course, Barney O'Connor, famous plainsman and early day officer who died just last fall at Dodge City. Incidently, the following copied from the Kingman (Kansas) Courier of May 9, 1884, indicates that Barney didn't care to give out very much information about the lynching a few days after it occurred:

"Barney H. O'Connor of Camp Rice, Texas, was in town last Friday. He was in Medicine Lodge the day of the double murder in that town and took part in the pursuit and capture of the desperadoes. He was in the crowd when Brown was shot, saw him breathe his last and witnessed the stringing up of the other three but would neither affirm nor deny that he took an active part in any of the proceedings after dark. He admitted doing nothing to prevent the lynching, assuring the reporter that such a course on his part or that of any other person would prove extremely unhealthy, and volunteering the statement that he had no disposition to defend such fellows from the punishment they so well merited."

The paper of the week before (May 2, 1884) carried a column story of the Medicine Lodge affair, which occurred the day before the paper went to press. Since there were no telegraph lines between the two towns in those days, it is interesting to note that the journalistic enterprise shown by the frontier paper is worthy of emulation even in this day. The "lead" of the story follows:

"Rumors, the most vague and indefinite about the double murder and lynching at Medicine Lodge, were all that could be secured yesterday until the arrival of the stage from the southwest. When that antique vehicle made its appearance on the street, a Courier reporter immediately cultivated the acquaintance of the most obliging driver and, subjecting him to a most rigid cross-examination, elicited from him the following facts"—and then he goes on for a column or two to tell of the affair.

Medicine Lodge is most famous because it was the scene of the "Medicine Lodge Peace Treaty" between the Government and the four great plains tribes of Indians—Kiowas, Comanches, Apaches and Cheyennes in October, 1867. Custer, Sheridan and other of the military historical figures were there, as was Henry M. Stanley, famous newspaper correspondent who later found Dr. Livingstone in Africa. About 5,000 Indians were present. By the treaty, the Indians agreed to quit attacking the workmen on the Kansas Pacific and to let "all the railroads be built, especially the Smoky Hill and Platte roads." The government agreed to allow the Indians to "hunt on the old reservation south of the Arkansas until the settlements drive them away from the hunting grounds."

—A. E. PALMER

WITH reference to a recent discussion of an exploding rifle, a comrade offers his own theory.

Iron Mountain, Michigan.

Evidently the rifle became leaded. Some rifles lead easily; other rifles seldom or never become leaded. When conditions are right the bullet often leaves a deposit. A thin smear of lead on the barrel each shot, and the deposit will increase until the bore becomes so small that the last bullet sticks. Where I was living for many years among frontier settlers this occurred frequently. It may have been due to the kind of metal in the barrel or the effect of atmospheric pressure.

At one time I had a portable saw mill and shingle machine. The shaft in the shingle machine was upright, the saw revolving flat across the table. One day while running full force but faster than the regulations required, the saw shaft suddenly stuck. The mill man said it was welded with heat, but he was mistaken. What really occurred was that the end of the shaft, running in the best oil I could procure, finally ground itself to a perfect fit and became a solid piece, joining the top and bottom bearing into one.

It may be that this joining of metals is similar, to what happens in a jammed and exploding rifle. Any two pieces of iron or steel can be ground and cleaned and placed together, and if the fit is perfect you will have a time prying them apart.

—JAMES C. LEY

AMONG the stacks of welcome mail exuberantly arriving of late there have appeared a few rancorous (and in one case even obscurely threatening) letters taking me to task for mixing

Adventure in politics. I confess they puzzle me more than they arouse me to give battle. *Adventure* belongs to no party and never has. But always *Adventure* has spoken up vigorously for good government, honesty in high places, a true and intelligent Americanism; and has done so with the country's good at heart, regardless of the political label worn by any administration then in power.

In a recent issue I spoke of the Civilian Conservation Corps as "the finest piece of practical good government in the whole New Deal". I stick by my guns—pointing out that the present conservation program is the logical outgrowth of a movement which first stirred to life in 1891 under one Republican President, and was given impetus by Gifford Pinchot under another one, the first Roosevelt. Conservation is neither New Deal, Democratic, nor a political issue. It is, as Pinchot himself said, "plain common sense"—and I submit that the young manhood of the nation is equally valuable with its forests, and as deserving of its care.

I offer the following with all due respect to my correspondent. He writes:

Referring to your editorial in April issue, in which you say:—"*Adventure* and Camp-Fire together cleave to the old unshakeable policy of hands off with regard to politics."

It is a pity you did not stop there.

As a reader who commenced with Number One, I am not impressed with the New Deal or the alphabet soup for reasons moral, financial, and political it would take an afternoon to expound.

In its simplest form one might suggest that the entire scheme is a nice plaything for a demagog, but full of dynamite.

Cut out the propaganda.

The best comment I can offer is a quotation from my own prompt and somewhat personal reply:

I'm afraid, friend, that you misinterpret the enthusiasm in my editorial. My own boyhood is not so far off that I cannot remember the craving for escape to the tall timber, to the high country, to the back trails of the nation. In one way and another, as with many of my generation, by foot, by canoe, by ancient car, I managed to indulge my craving, but not without difficulty. There were times when the existence of such a thing as the C. C. C. would have seemed heaven-designed.

My enthusiasm is for the boys, bless them! Have you consulted them? I have. Have you looked on fine, decent young men without number paralyzed by the long depression and eating their hearts out in idle, futile misery? I have. And do you approve of that lot for them? I don't!

Six years ago, in an editorial in the old *Everybody's*, which I was then running, I wrote in enthusiastic approval of an edict of Mussolini's whereby every Italian shipmaster must on demand give free passage to worthy, accredited Italian young men to the number of four, to any port on the ship's itinerary. The young men could return similarly. It was desired that Italian youth enjoy the broadening influence of travel at an age when few can afford. My applause had nothing to do with Mussolini. As a matter of fact, if I'd been asked at that time, I'd probably have voiced my disapproval of the man and all his political philosophy. But he did a good turn to the kind of youngster I had been myself.

I'll not engage you in dispute about the New Deal. I'll concede your right to your own opinion. But leave me my gratification that the boys are getting a break.

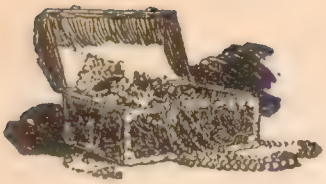
And now that's enough about politics. This is no political forum; this is *Adventure*. As a matter of fact, it was about adventure that I was writing—the adventure of a gallant generation in the wilds.

—W. C.

For the benefit of those who are newly come to their places in this friendly and informal circle around the Camp-Fire we print again this statement of its aims, its intentions, and its hopes.

Our Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, exactly twenty-two years ago, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The spirit of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.

If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There are no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.



ASK ADVENTURE

For free information and services
you can't get elsewhere

What is the best time of day to catch a monkey? How fast does a parachute fall? Why do some ocean liners have extra dummy funnels? How is sourdough made? Who owns discovered treasure? What is a safe grubstake for Alaska?

All these questions have been answered in authoritative and highly interesting fashion by Ask-Adventure's many experts. This issue offers an additional page of such material—and a modest new department which we have assembled from the storehouse of fascinating information in our files. You'll find it on page 126.

VAGARIES of the Iron Horse.

Request:—"Will you please tell me what class-one roads use red passenger cars? Are there any other colors used for passenger cars aside from red, green, or black?"

—RAY CHURCH, Newaygo, Mich.

Reply, by R. T. Newman:—The Pennsylvania Railroad uses the red-colored cars, also I noticed some on the Soo Line some few months ago, but the railroads are changing to the olive green, with the exception of the Milwaukee which have all yellow or orange color. Even the Pullman cars are orange or yellow. Some roads as a rule, on their most important train, give it a red or blue color—even having the locomotive the same color as the coaches.

IN CLOSE work it gives greater penetration and quicker release than the bayonet—the trench knife.

Request:—"I have read that the trench knives issued to American troops during the Great War were considered exceedingly deadly weapons.

A trench knife shown to me in an Army goods store recently is not really a knife at all, but a triangular stiletto, pretty much like a triangular file, except that the sides were smooth, and there is a loop of knobbed metal on the grip that could be used for punching—pretty much like a set of brass knuckles. While the edges formed by the three sides of the blade are fairly sharp, they are not sharp in the same sense as a regular knife-blade is sharp. I don't think they could be used to cut anything. Altogether this trench knife is a stabbing and punching weapon, and I am writing to ask whether a definite technique for fighting with it has ever been worked out."

—H. S. MCCAULEY, Evanston, Illinois

Reply, by Capt. R. E. Gardner:—There were certain conditions under which the trench knife would prove more effective than the bayonet used without the rifle. Both weapons are essentially weapons of the thrusting classification, the trench knife being the more effective because of its bodkin point. Due to its cross-section and length of blade the bayonet to be really effective requires its employment on the rifle with the weight of the arm and the user behind it. If we were to use them both under the same conditions I am sure that you would grant this to be true. Suppose we take each in order, grasping them at the grip in the palm with the four fingers about the grip-thumb toward pommel—and deliver a sweeping, downward, stabbing blow. The triangular trench knife would give greater penetration and quicker release than the bayonet and has the added virtues of the studded knuckle-guard for punching and its shorter length and better balance for fighting at close quarters.

According to tables compiled by the Medical Department, showing the number and classification of casualties during the American participation in the World War, the trench knife does not appear to have been much used. It was usually part of the equipment of raiding parties where silence was necessary to success and was for that purpose a very effective weapon.

THEY'LL visit with dogs for a fight or a frolic—coyotes.

Request:—"Will you please tell me if it is true that coyotes ever coax a dog off with them and kill him? We have a lovely police dog and I am afraid to let him out by himself for a long time in the evening, for coyotes come around very close."

—BEATRICE INGERSOLL, Miramar, California

Reply, by Mr. Raymond S. Spears:—Recently a friend told me of coyotes in Mexico, just below the Border, trying to get at a small dog belonging to a friend of his in their tent on one of the big Chihuahua ranches.

Sometimes coyotes come to play with dogs around a ranch—sometimes a coyote mates with a dog—but when there are several coyotes they are likely to tease or fight a dog.

Your police dog is descended from wolves, centuries ago. I believe that police dogs are more often playful with coyotes than other breeds of dogs. I think your dog would be able to take care of himself, escape to the house in case of

attack. There is some risk in it. His actions when coyotes are near might help you tell. If he wants to go out, not angry but eager for a romp, he'll show it. The chances are he would romp around the neighborhood with the coyotes. There are a good many reports of halfbreed dogs in the wilderness and many halfbreed wolves (coyotes) at ranches in isolated ranch regions. It is true, though, that occasionally dogs used to hunt coyotes are attacked by coyotes.

Personally I should let the dog out, but keep tabs on him for a night or two, making sure there isn't a fight. You have an opportunity to study and observe the matter—and I should make use of it, if I were you. Coyotes are among the most interesting of wild life too often killed wantonly when, living, they are worthy companions of dogs—and the two learn a lot from each other. The dog's demeanor would show whether he was going for a fight or a frolic—and I'd like to know what you find out about them.

CAN anybody tell us about this one? Our expert is stumped, and so are we.

Request:—"It might be worth while to include the following in a near issue. I have an inquiry for the old Grenadier March, entitled "The World's Turned Upside Down", including both words and music. It is supposed to still be in use in certain regiments, I imagine in Great Britain. It's a very old timer. Up to date I have not found anything referring to it."

—ROBERT FROTHINGHAM

WANT to go around the world in sixty feet of boat? Here's what your board and keep will cost.

Request:—"There are three of us soon to retire from the Navy after twenty years service and have in mind buying a fifty or sixty foot boat for a round the world trip, via Panama and Suez Canals.

I have read many books on the subject, but all failed to mention what their expenses were. Considering the boat (a ketch, yawl, or bald headed schooner, Marconi rigged), well found, and supplied for the trip and confident of our ability to get where we're going; what do you consider a fair monthly expense for a two year trip barring accidents and sickness?

There will be two wives in the crew and one single man. Five altogether.

—H. G. JACKSON, Chief Quartermaster
U. S. S. California, Seattle, Wash.

Reply, by A. R. Knauer:—Your comment about the failure of the various writers to mention their expenses is very well taken as I cannot recollect off hand of any of them giving itemized expenses, although Ralph Stock in his "Cruise of the Dream Ship," published by Doubleday Page & Co., comes fairly near giving some definite costs. I would suggest your reading this book as it has a lot of worthwhile information besides being well written.

I know one party who does a lot of rather extensive cruising, and who has also made the big circle whose expenses probably ran around $30.00 a month single-handed. A party of five could do it on less in proportion. This, of course, does not take into consideration your port and shore expenses. You will also do some fishing undoubtedly which would help vary your food supply.

As you cannot spend any money while at sea you can figure fairly close as to what it will cost you by figuring up your approximate daily food bill for ship stores. I think you will find that the plain foods will treat you more kindly than a lot of fancy tinned goods. Water glassed eggs, condensed milk, dried fruits, good ships biscuits, scotch oatmeal, sugar, tea, coffee, cocoa, lard, hand salted butter, jam and fresh stores for as long as they will keep will probably be as good a list as any.

BETTER to make your own throwing knives than chance them ready-made.

Request:—"I would very much like to acquire skill as a knife thrower. I have broken numerous knives in practising. I am sure that they were not of the proper weight etc; therefore I could not do myself justice.

Perhaps you could tell me where I could get knives that are made for this purpose."

—WILLIAM F. ZUCKERT, New York, N. Y.

Reply, by Mr. R. E. Gardner:—Knife-throwers, for the most part, fashion their own knives, or have them made to specification. I would suggest the old U. S. bayonet for the Krag or the short model German bayonet for the Mauser. These are sturdy blades and though they are rather heavy they can be ground down to about the desired weight and dimension. If too much of the blade is not removed they also possess the virtue of balance.

A MYTH! There's no such thing in Madagascar as a man-eating tree.

Request:—"Do you know of any Madagascar tribes which make human sacrifices to what is known as 'The man-eating tree'? If so, in what part of the island do they exist? And what are the greatest hazards you have to contend with in reaching them?"

—ARTHUR CLARK, San Francisco, California

Reply, by Mr. Ralph Linton:—The story of the "man-eating tree" of Madagascar is pure fiction. There is no such tree, and the story is not even based on a native legend. No native whom I met—and I visited most of the tribes—had ever heard of such a thing. The story seems to have been originated by a German about 1870, and its first appearance in Madagascar was when it was reprinted from an Australian paper by the *Antananarivo Annual,* a scientific year book gotten out by missionaries and others living in the island.

I can not give you the exact date of this re-

print, since I have no files of the *Annual* here; but it was about 1880, and the reprint was accompanied by a comment on the wild tales about Madagascar which were then current among people who knew nothing of the island. The story had been entirely forgotten until it was resurrected by an American author, who wrote a book about the island after a very brief visit.

BLOW the man down! You've often heard the expression in a sea chantey—what does it mean?

Request:—"In the sea chanties we frequently find the phrase "Blow the man down." How did this phrase originate? In nautical tales we read of no orders being given which might be translated into the above. We read of no blasts on the "bo'sun's" whistle to call men from aloft which might be interpreted as "blowing the men down." Is it purely poetic license, or is it nautical slang, or has it a real foundation in early nautical terms?

And another. I know what the technique is when I am invited to "splice the main brace," but what is the "main brace"? Is it nautical slang, or is there some part of the gear that was once called the "main brace"?

—DR. RALPH H. WILLIAMS, Rochester, N. Y.

Reply, by Mr. Chas. H. Hall:—Like most folk lore, the old sea shanties have been handed down mainly by word of mouth and consequently corruption has crept in. However, I have always understood that "Blow the man down" meant *knock* the man down. In the old days at sea it was a word and a blow. The safety of the ship might depend on instant obedience so that discipline was strict, not to say brutal. There must have been sadistic captains and officers. Then, too, the crews came aboard drunk and did not sober up until the ship was well on her way to sea. Too often men shipped as able seamen when they were incapable and inexperienced. The officer had a thankless task, with a valuable ship in his charge and an incompetent crew at times.

The main brace is one of the principal ropes of a square-rigger as it controls the main yard, on which the mainsail is set and to which the main topsail is sheeted. The weather main brace took a tremendous strain and when it stranded there was a job to secure it and renew it. "Splicing the main brace" as it meant serving out an issue of grog, celebrated the completion of an important and uncomfortable job. The saying, in that sense, was in use at least as early as 1862.

HOW did Robin Hood do it?

Request:—"What kind of wood is best for flight arrows?

Is 29 inches better than 28 inches?

How should they be shaped—tapered at both ends or straight?

What length and height feathers?

Where should the balance be—center, forward or aft?

How do you aim for targets? That is, what system of sighting is used?

I have been using a 35 lb. bow. I am having a 60 lb. made for me now for use in archery golf. What do you think of this weight?"

—R. L. WAGNER, Cleveland, O.

Reply, by Earl Powell:—Altogether too much stress has been laid on an exceedingly light arrow for flight. My own best results have been gotten with an ordinary target shaft with the feathers cut low, say, about a third of the surface (or a little more) which can be done by cutting the vanes about one-third as high as usual.

If you can build an arrow lighter which will stay as stiff, it may or may not go a lot further. But as a rule, when you get one too light it is also too weak to stand the slap of a strong bow and flirts. An arrow that whips from the force of the bow will actually go less distance than one of greater weight that is not too limber.

So an arrow say about 29 inches and weighing 320 grains, with a feather about 2 inches long and one quarter inch high, is just about as good as any. If you are using a very heavy bow it is a good idea to have a still heavier arrow.

As to aiming for the targets there are two systems used in shooting. There is one called the "instinct" system, but it is better to call this the parallel system, as the arrow lies parallel to the line of sight and by looking intently at the target and not at the arrow, if your position is right, it will land the arrow where you look. When you learn to judge your distance to allow for drop, you can really shoot. This system is used for hunting and archery golf. It is the system I usually employ as I am an outdoor shooter and go in for hunting mostly.

The Point of Aim system consists of sighting over the point of the arrow at some object above or below or on the target, and if you hold right, you can usually hit if you know your distance.

This system is no good for hunting as the game does not wait for you to establish a point of aim. Most archers you meet use the point of aim system, but that is because they know no better. It brings you a better score at the measured distances, but for *practical* shooting it is useless.

Your bow should be a good weight for archery golf, say about 50 to 60 lbs.

SOLDIERS of the U. S. S. R.—their merits and possibilities.

Request:—"For the past few years I have been reading about the Russians to learn something about their army. Some of the books and articles call it a "wonderful" army, however, I have been unable to find anything about the individuals who make up this "wonderful" army, how it is organized, training methods so, I am asking you to please tell me all you can.

How does the ordinary soldier do his soldiering—that is, what are his routine duties, training, pay, status relative to civilians, promotion, length of enlistment? How does a commissioned

officer become such? What kind of schools do they have? In efficiency and ability, how does a Russian soldier compare with an American soldier?"

—JOSEPH M. KOLESON, Second Observation Squadron, Nichols Field, Rizal, P. I.

Reply, by Capt. G. R. Townsend:—To your questions concerning the Russian army, I can give only a partial answer. The fact is that very little is known concerning the inner administration of Russia and especially of its military affairs. Now that the U. S. S. R. has been recognized and we are exchanging military and naval attaches, we will doubtlessly obtain additional and accurate information.

The Russian soldier today is taught to obey his superior officers and is subject to a discipline of the same general type that exists in all other armies. The nearest the Russian army today approaches the ideal of the Bolsheviki Revolution —when councils of soldiers took over the virtual command of the army and its units—is the appointment of a political Commissiar for each regiment and similar unit, one of whose duties is to look after the welfare of the soldier in the ranks. While I do not have detailed information, it is apparent that, aside from the political commissiar, the hierarchy of command through various grades is very similar to that in our own army.

In general organization, also, the Russian army resembles other armies of the world with the infantry, artillery, cavalry, and other arms and services, including the air service. There is an especial emphasis, however, on modern methods of warfare, especially mechanization, aerial and chemical warfare. Russia especially seems to have built a vast number of tanks of small and medium sizes. She has been limited in her aerial and mechanical advancement, however, by the general undevelopment of the nation along mechanical lines, a defect which the new government has been striving to remedy as rapidly as possible.

The Russian soldier in the past has usually been of good quality but sacrificed to the incompetency of poor political and military leadership. Whether he will be as efficient, individually, with the new weapons and new science of war, remains to be seen. It is probably that he will be better led. The commissioned personnel is largely selected from the ranks of the army, presumably for demonstrated ability. It would seem that the Russian government being what it is, that political and oratorical ability will have somewhat of an advantage over plain military efficiency. But of course that also can only be tested in war.

The Russian army maintains a very complete school system, teaching not only military tactics and technique, but also mechanics and of course politics. The army considers propaganda as one of the most effective weapons.

Things you never knew till

ADVENTURE TOLD YOU

(This material is compiled entirely from the files of *Ask Adventure*)

IT IS a matter of record that children have been spirited away by animals who reared them as their own offspring. A child so stolen by wolves was found in the Agra district of India in 1867. He was put into an asylum, where all efforts failed to eradicate the effects of his vulpine upbringing. During his twenty-eight years in the asylum he never attained an upright position. He never learned to talk. His nearest approach to civilized conduct was when he discovered the art of eating with his fingers instead of wolfing all food.

IN THE feudal period in Japan (12th to 19th Centuries) all members of the upper class (the sumarai) were required to master the art of fencing *with two swords*. This was equally required of the women as of the men.

BEFORE the British Government established its campaign against the famous society of Thugs in India, their victims frequently reached the terrifying number of fifteen thousand men and women a year. These "religious" murders are now practically eliminated.

THE intelligent but rigidly exclusive San Blas Indians of Panama (who warn intruders the first time, but whose second reception is unknown because the trespassers do not return to civilization to tell) manufacture out of hollowed native trees by primitive means for trading with the Outside a type of sailing craft called the *bougoe* which is not only seaworthy but can ship a cargo *as high as eighteen tons.*

ELEPHANTS are so numerous and bothersome in Burma that the Government maintains a special "Keddah" or elephant catching department.

A PROSPECTOR who struck it rich in the mountains near the headwaters of the Yuba River, Idaho, gathered a quantity of nuggets estimated at one hundred pounds, carried it on his shoulders in a sack until he was lost and tired out, then buried it at the foot of a tree—and hunted each year of his life after that without ever finding it again. Three of the nuggets, carried out in his pocket and sold to a jeweler, brought $108.

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Send each question *direct* to the expert in charge of the section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. **Do Not** send questions to this magazine. Be definite; explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question. The magazine does not assume any responsibility. **No Reply** will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing or for employment.

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BY JEFFERSON MACHAMER

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